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Christ a friend: thirteen discourses, by



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CHRIST A FRIEND.

BY

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N O T E .

THESE Discourses are intended by the author as a counterpart to his volume, "The Friends of Christ in the New Testament." There, the Saviour was seen befriended ; here, we see him as a Friend.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. BEHOLD HOW HE LOVED HIM, ...	7
II. THE CALL OF MATTHEW, ...	35
III. THE WIDOW OF NAIN AND HER SON, ...	54
IV. CONVERSION OF ZACCHEUS, ...	74
V. WHO TOUCHED ME?	96
VI. THOMAS, ...	116
VII. PETER ON THE WAVES, ...	143
VIII. NATHANAEL, ...	165
IX. THE FRIEND OF SEAMEN, ...	183
X. JOHN, ...	206
XI. THOU SHALT NEVER WASH MY FEET, ...	227
XII. PAUL, ...	245
XIII. STEPHEN, ...	262

CHRIST A FRIEND.

I.

BEHOLD HOW HE LOVED HIM.

THEN SAID THE JEWS, BEHOLD HOW HE LOVED HIM.

WE cannot draw the line between those parts of our Saviour's conduct nor among those feelings which proceeded, respectively, from his divine and human natures. It is not intended that we should do so. The Saviour's own manner of speaking concerning himself is a safe and sufficient guide in speaking of him. Without explanation or hesitation he says things of himself which can be true of only one of his natures. "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" "No man hath ascended into heaven but he which came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven." "Before Abraham was, I am." "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." The Bible leads us to think and speak of him at the same moment as

creating the world, laid in a manger; upholding all things by the word of his power, and a man of sorrows; every where present and searching the heart, disappointed under a barren fig tree, ignorant of certain times; tempted of the devil, yet terrifying a legion of devils by his approach; on a cross and on a great white throne, the Resurrection and the Life, yet dying between two thieves; sent a prisoner from Pilate to Herod and from Herod to Pilate, then sitting with the whole human race at his tribunal. We no more feel that there is inconsistency in these several representations than in singing at the same hour of public worship a psalm respecting the vanity of man as mortal, and dying Galileo's exulting apostrophe and farewell to the "golden lamps of heaven."

It is the perfectness of just conceptions and feelings respecting Christ to think and speak of him thus promiscuously as God and man, without misgiving; to address him in a way which is really inconsistent with one of his natures; at Bethlehem to join with angels adoring him in his slumber, and then, with saints and angels in heaven proceeding to his feet with their crowns, to say, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain."

If we do not thus regard Christ, we shall be tried with cold, speculative efforts to fix the right proportion between the divine and human in his feelings and actions; and thus he will be to us a difficult and repul-

sive formula, a problem never solved, rather than an object of love. As well might we try to discriminate between the feelings which have their origin in our mortal and immortal natures. It is interesting to know, that of the great numbers who have been perplexed with regard to the union of two natures in Christ, and have at last become the worshipers of Immanuel, God with us, no one ever solved the mystery in the divine nature to his own satisfaction, but simply received Christ as he is represented in the Bible, at once God and man ; and as there is no confusion in the scriptural representations of Christ by reason of his two natures, so there proves to be none in the feelings of those who believe in him, not speculatively, but with the heart, and “to the saving of the soul.”

Instead of its being an objection to these views respecting Christ that we attribute some things to his human nature and other things to his divine nature, — an objection which lies equally against the way in which we speak of ourselves, — we say that a Saviour in whom such things coexist, combining our nature with deity, in his person, is so perfectly adapted to our wants, it is so much to be desired, that should the theory of such a combination have been presented to us beforehand, we should all have said, Were this possible, what a provision it would be for the highest interests and happiness of man ! We find such a

Saviour in Christ. He comes to the relief of our weak nature, which, in every age of the world, has sought for incarnations of the Supreme Being. Christ fulfills all those desires, as he also does the types of the Old Testament. Among the unsearchable riches which are said to be in him, not the least are his human qualities; for without them it is obvious that the practical value of his incarnation would cease. We love to think of him as a dependent man, a praying man, a tempted man, a man of sorrows; and to know that deity within him does not absorb his human nature into itself, but leaves it original and entire. The laws of the double consciousness which there must be in him we may with due humility abstain from exploring, at least till we have understood the mystery of the union in ourselves of mind with matter. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

It is a beautiful feature in his character as Redeemer that Christ presents himself to us in ways which interest all our feelings; not standing before us as a mere representation of the divine government with the articles of agreement and the price of our ransom in his hands, but commending himself to our inmost souls as one whom we can greatly love because we perceive in him every emotion, pure and exalted, that pertains to our nature. We are permitted to love him even in the cradle. We follow him through every

stage of human life to manhood, and think that he was once just as old, to a day, as each child of the family and congregation, and that he knows every thing peculiar to that age and state. Though God and Lord of angels, who received command, at his entrance into the world, to worship him, yet the sisters of a deceased and buried friend were not so impassioned in their sorrow on approaching the grave as he ; for the depth and sincerity of his grief so plainly marked him as chief mourner, and produced the impression that he was more than a common friend, that the spectators, at the grave, who thought of him only as a man, and as one of the mourners, said, "Behold how he loved him !"

He is not only our Redeemer from the curse of the law, our Lord and Master, our final Judge ; he is our personal Friend. These discourses will present him to us as a Friend to various individuals whose circumstances, it will be found, comprise the large compass of human wants and woes.

We will now consider his character as a Friend in one full view, and in the discourses following, dwell upon the particular illustrations of it in his life.

Christ knows all our circumstances and feelings.

When we spread before him the circumstances in which we are placed, he sees relations of things which

we can not perceive. Want of knowledge is a great impediment with our friends. They can only confess their ignorance, and their consequent inability to help us ; the expression of sympathy is then the only comfort which they can afford. We go to our heavenly Friend, and find one who compasses our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. When we begin to speak to him, we can say, Lord, thou knowest all things, past, present, and to come. We are not troubled to obtain information to lay before him, as before other friends, nor, having obtained it, to make an exact representation of it to guard against misconception ; but omitting all this, we can say, O thou omniscient Saviour and Friend, all these things are naked and open to thine eye. What wilt thou have me to do ?

And still at other times we find ourselves making statements and explanations, reasoning and remonstrating, complaining and urging, confessing that we had kept a secret from him, bringing new arguments, and new thoughts and feelings, as David says, "I poured out my complaint ; I showed before him my trouble."

But Christ has knowledge which extends beyond a mere acquaintance with circumstances. He knows our most secret thoughts and wishes ; the rising desire, the unformed thought, the secret fear, the delicacies and difficulties of our situations ; these he

thoroughly knows and appreciates. We can express feelings and wishes to him which we would not dare utter in the ear of a fellow-creature, nor by any means be willing that he should suspect. Moreover, we frequently fail to find words with which to convey certain feelings; then we are misunderstood, and are pained to see that our meaning is not received; or we are in doubt whether we have given a just impression. How is it in our intercourse with Christ? No labored utterance is necessary to make him understand things which friends can not comprehend. A very few words, confused, it may be, with sighs and groans, are employed to express ourselves, because we are as much impressed with his perfect knowledge as with our trouble.

It is an illustration of the human method in which we are encouraged to speak of Christ, and a further qualification in him to be a friend, that —

The Saviour has manifested the most affectionate feelings.

There never was such a heart as we find in Jesus Christ. No father, mother, husband, wife, sister, child, or lover can compare with him in his disposition and power to love. It was the great love wherewith he loved us that made him a Saviour; so that the Apostle speaks of it as a “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” adding, “and to

know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

This love is not a passionate, impulsive feeling; nor is it, like human love, influenced by fancy; nor is it variable. It is not selfish. There are no private ends to be gained by it. He loves because it is his nature to love. Nor is it fastidious. Infirmities and disagreeable peculiarities, which repel others, no more alienate the Saviour from us, if we are sincerely pious, than the wounds or deformities, the sightless eyes, or wasted face of her child alienate a mother's feelings. It is impossible for us to suit the taste or fancy of many; nor does any one enjoy peculiar intimacy with a large number. Our Saviour sees in every one of us that which inspires him with affection. If our heart condemn us, he is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, and among them not only sins which we forget, but sincerity, and true desires, and godly sorrows which we have overlooked or underrated. If God is love, — God, the holy, just, sin-hating God, the Avenger, the Judge, — if all those attributes in him which strike terror into the wicked heart do not overpower this prevailing element of the divine nature, — what must Christ be, who is the exponent of the love of God! He has, indeed, the other attributes of Godhead, "for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" but he is intended to be the expression of divine love to man. In accordance with

this he says, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." "Love divine, all love excelling," is his chief characteristic.

Christ has had great experience as a Friend.

It is proper to speak of experience on the part of Christ; and here is another illustration of the human ways in which we may think of him. He "grew in wisdom" when he was young. As man, he had never been in heaven, though he spake of himself as the Son of man, "which came down from heaven, and is in heaven." This illustrates his capacity as man for progressive experience.

As he is said to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, his atonement being anticipated, and the government of the world proceeding with this in view, so we may say that Christ has always been in our world, making friends and loving them. Abraham saw his day and was glad, which implies that he loved Christ. Though born in Bethlehem Ephratah, his goings forth had been of old, from everlasting. When it is said the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, the meaning is, the very spirit of the inspired prophetic writings is testimony concerning Jesus. He was Jacob's friend. Micah says that it was the angel of the covenant, or Messiah, whom Jacob "found in Bethel." We believe that Joshua saw him at the opening conquest of Canaan, with a drawn

sword in his hand, saying, for the encouragement of Israel and her leader, "As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come," and then directing Joshua, as none but God ever did, to loose his shoes from off his feet. But we shall quote too largely from the Old Testament history if we dwell on this theme.

Christ will continue to have new friends and new friendships while the world stands; and as heretofore, so hereafter, he will always have affections varying with the particular objects of his love. Suppose that you should to-day enter into friendship with Christ. He would perceive in you a new object of love, and would have feelings toward you which have never been excited toward any one else. We see this illustrated in parents of large families, each child exciting a love peculiar to itself. As your face appearing for the first time at the Lord's table differs from every other, as your signature appended to the articles and covenant of the church is unlike the hundreds of handwritings on that most interesting record, so the Saviour's love to you will have in it something personal and special. What experience, then, Christ has had, and will have, as a friend! Besides, Christ loves every Christian friend of yours, as really as he loves you; he is therefore interested in your friendships and attachments, and from his large experience as a friend he knows the things which will make you perfectly happy.

Christ has passed through great afflictions.

In such a world as this, an angel would be an unsuitable companion and intimate friend. His face would be too bright at times when we needed him to pity us; there would be no minor key in his feelings, for what has he ever known of sorrow? He would tell us how well he supposes he could bear pain if he were in our place; he would rejoice when it was a time to weep, for he would look too exclusively on the bright side of events, and that would not correspond with our disciplinary state. But after all, he who has had experience of great and sore trials, and has borne them well, is by far the most cheerful companion to a sorrowing heart. Having sounded the depths of affliction, he can best guide his friend in them. Desponding Christian in the River of Death said to Hopeful, "I sink in deep waters, the billows go over my head, all his waves go over me." Hopeful said, "Be of good cheer, my brother; I feel the bottom, and it is good." Having been partaker of the affliction and of the consolation, such a one can bring a smile of peace, and even of joy, upon a care-worn face, when prosperous friends only deepen the gloom and the sighs by their inexperienced songs to heavy hearts. Let the angel of the Lord encamp around me to deliver me, but give me the man of sorrows for my friend. I want a friend who has been stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Then I can tell him

each rising grief, knowing that he has felt it. A dying man looks upon kind friends about his bed, and thinks, How little do you know by experience about this! But his heavenly Friend "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." We watch the faces of our children, and dear companions, and friends, as death approaches, and in their agony of death we feel helpless as they; but Jesus died, and needs no help from us in his perfect sympathy with the departing spirit. Dear, dying Friend! what would certain death-beds have been to us, and to the dying, without thee!

In all points tempted like as we are, and as captain of our salvation made perfect through sufferings, he has been wherever it must be our lot to go. Whatever new and strange emotions of sorrow swell within us like the great deep, Christ has felt all this, and knows how to help us. Even if you go down out of the ship to walk on the waves, Jesus is walking there, even to the fourth watch of the night.

In our temptations, how poorly qualified an angel would be to sympathize with us! The fiery darts of the devil do not fly at him. Those evil passions, that forgetfulness and contempt of God, those dreadful thoughts which make you shudder, as they are thrust into your heart, he, with his unsullied virtue and its impregnable defences, never knew. Christ was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. We find only a brief narrative of those

days and nights; but we can somewhat imagine the anguish of soul occasioned by the solicitations of hell, what distress the thought of wickedness awakened in that Lamb of God, what intolerable disgust and pain in hearing and seeing the prince of darkness, as he plied his diabolical arts to impugn the divine character, and with hypocrisy, cunning craftiness, and lies, aided by the counsels of the pit, wrought desperately to effect his purpose. If the arch enemy seeks with such skill and perseverance to ruin us, he must have exhausted the ingenuity of his counselors and his own experience to ruin Christ by temptation. Blessed Redeemer! what had become of us if thou hadst faltered? Seeing us struggling with a great temptation, what memories and what sympathies stir within thee!

Christ, as a Friend, is constant.

We might expect that eternal love will be everlasting. It is said, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." One thing can be said of this friend, He never gave up one friend for another; there is nothing fickle, inconstant, in his feelings. If he loves you once, he will love you forever, with increasing affection; but this will be equally true, that you will continue to love him, and that increasingly.

Amid the changes of life, and when you cease to move the affections or excite the interest which were

once felt toward you ; when your outward and inward attractions, your senses, your power to help others, are greatly impaired ; when you are old and decrepit, and are only tolerated, and are a burden to yourself, — the Saviour will love you as he did when you were young. “And even to your old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you.” We see this confirmed in the experience of many an aged saint, loving Christ, and evidently loved by him far more than in youth, showing the pure disinterestedness as well as the constancy of the Saviour’s love ; and in these respects how unlike many, very many instances of human attachment and affection !

Christ, as a Friend, is kind.

We read of “the kindness and love of God our Saviour.” There is an obvious and beautiful distinction between love and kindness. The kindness of Christ is illustrated, among other things, in this, that he does not indulge in upbraiding and reproach. There is a gentleness of wisdom in his way of correcting us, adapting his reproofs with wonderful skill, touching certain feelings, and exciting thoughts, which enter into our souls more than a hundred stripes. Who has not been subdued by the delicate and kind methods by which he has been brought to see his error, opportunity being afforded to retract without loss of reputation, or severe wounds to his sensibilities,

and by means of just so much of a suggestion as implies confidence in him, instead of being beaten as the horse and the mule. David seems to have felt this when he said, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." We feel thankful to a friend, who, when he sees we are in the wrong, merely drops a general remark, or simply raises a question, not as a hint, but intended to be fully understood, yet with the feeling that a word to the wise is sufficient. As we come to ourselves, and see our mistake, the friend who forbore to deal harshly with us when he saw our folly, appears to us prudent and kind ; we love him and trust in him, and wish that we could be as forbearing and wise. He who spoke from heaven so gently and kindly to the persecuting Saul, and turned and looked on Peter, and treated the unbelieving Thomas with such affecting skill, is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. "Lord, to whom shall we go" but unto thee ?

Christ is long suffering in his kindness.

We should have broken the heart of every friend on earth, had we treated him as we have treated Christ. When at his table we remember our sins against him, and he cheers us with his forgiving love, he makes us feel how patient and forgiving he is, and that, were it not for this, he would many a time have declared his covenant with us dissolved by our unfaith-

fulness to that covenant. When we have done wickedly, and are afraid to pray, and therefore, as David did, keep silence, some great mercy, some favorable turn in our affairs, some touching event which interests our feelings as a special act of kindness, some meltings of heart, will move us to confess and repent; and thus he draws us with the cords of love and the bands of a man. He punished Moses, the meekest of men, severely, for his want of forbearance toward Israel in their provocations. Christ has great occasion still for long suffering and forbearance with each of us, and with his churches. When a controversy and quarrel arises in a church, and you are called to hear their accusations and recriminations, and perceive that one act of forbearance, or confession and Christian love, at the right time, would have prevented the whole, (yet they could not watch with Christ one hour,) you see his forbearance illustrated, and perceive that his sufferings for his church are followed by sufferings from his church, and that there is something yet to be filled up of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake, which is the church. Of every church, perhaps, in some part of its history, and of each of us, it will be said with truth hereafter concerning the treatment which we have received from Christ, "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them and carried them all the days of old."

He is always with us.

Some of our greatest trials are by separations from those whom we need to counsel and help us. Christ says, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." We lie down in the narrow berth in the sides of the ship, and Jesus is with us as though we were in our own beds at home. We land among strangers, every face unknown to us, but the Saviour is at our side. He needs no help of friends in protecting us. Parents, husbands, and wives think of their absent children or companions, who, they hear, are sick or in peril, and they wish that they could fly to them. But they can procure for them the presence and help of Christ, without whom even their presence would be of no use. As afflicted relatives said, Lord, I beseech thee, come, so we may say, Lord, I beseech thee, go and heal my child. Far off to the Pacific shores, or in the sultry tropics, behold him languishing. That wandering child, that "younger son," Shepherd and Bishop of souls, keep thine eye upon him. The foreign missionary places his two young children under the care of his friend, a captain of a vessel, and sends them across the sea to the parents' native land. What a treasure does that vessel bear! Who can describe the feelings of the parents on the headland as the white sails become gray and dim in the departing daylight, and suddenly disappear behind a billow? What sustains the parents then?

This is to “forsake children” for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s; and where is the hundred fold in this life? Christ has not only gone in the ship, but he imparts a hundred fold in this life to the parents, in the vivid faith and the exceeding love which they feel toward him, which they tell us is worth all that it cost in the sacrifice of natural affection. “Thou art with me,” is the all-sufficient reason why we should “fear no evil” even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Christ can do for us things which no other friend can do.

When the wisdom of friends fails, there is one who is called Wonderful, Counselor. When their means of helping us are deficient, we “are blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth,” and therefore has heaven and earth from which to draw in providing for us.

Christ is our Friend when all our friends are dead. Some of you are very desolate, and the world is entirely changed to you since that dear companion, or child, or relative, was taken from you. But Christ was your Friend before they were, and he gave them to you; he lays his right hand upon you, and says, “Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore!”

Christ will be our Friend when we come to die. Our great concern, if we have our senses, then will be, Is Christ my Friend? What though the house were full of friends and physicians? "Christ in you the hope of glory," would be more than all. Should the crowns of earth be laid on your bed, you would say, A steadfast hope that Christ is my Friend is worth infinitely more than these. What did the souls that wore them do without Christ when they came to die?

Christ will be our Friend at the bar of God. Friends can not help us, plead for us, and shield us. But if Christ is my Friend I am as safe at the bar of God as though Christ stood there for me. How safe the man Christ Jesus would be on trial at the bar of God! — yet no more safe than you if "found in him, not having" your "own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith." It shall be said for you, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died."

We shall have the Saviour's friendship at the resurrection of the dead. All things will be dissolved, the earth and the heavens will flee away, and there shall be found no place for them; every eye will be directed toward the Saviour in robes of judgment. A look of recognition from him in that hour, an assurance of safety, will be worth a life spent in extreme self-denial and sacrifice for Christ's sake, even if it were not its own reward. As though Christ knew what our feelings are in anticipation of that great day

when the dead shall awake, three times in one discourse he utters these words: "And I will raise him up at the last day." But do not forget that you will have come with Christ to judgment; that your triumphant spirit, like Christ, will "descend from heaven with a shout," and receive your glorified body at your grave. "Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

We shall have Christ for our Friend in heaven. He is your personal Friend here; he manifests himself to your faith, and makes you feel that he is with you; will he be less your Friend, or less able to bless you, when you see him face to face? He will sit with you in your mansion, as at Bethany; you will have private, personal intercourse with him who loved you and gave himself for you. "Since thou hast been precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee." If you may sit with him on his throne, he will not refuse to sit with you in that place which he has gone to "prepare for you."

One thing more which makes the value of the Saviour as a Friend exceeding great, and for its practical value perhaps nothing which has been said exceeds it, is this:—

We can have resort to this Friend as often as we please.

If we called the attention of our best earthly friend

to us as often as we call on Christ in our private moments — if any friend, however near and dear to us, heard us using his name as much as we appeal to the Saviour, — he could not endure it ; he would be weary of us. But you may lie all night upon a bed of pain and call on Christ, and he will hear and pity you. When you have presented a particular case to him which interests you greatly, you need not, you do not, hesitate to ask him, again and again, to remember your prayer. The unjust judge said, “lest by her continual coming she weary me.” So would any earthly friend say, just or unjust. We state our case to a friend, and feel that it is respectful to leave it. We can not rehearse it to him many times, and dwell upon the circumstances, which he appreciates as well as we. It is not suitable to appear at his door every hour. But you can knock at Christ’s door every hour, and say, “How long, O Lord?” “Hast thou forgotten to be gracious?” “Hast thou in anger shut up thy tender mercies?” “I watch for thee more than they that watch for the morning ; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.” We can talk more frequently with Christ than with the dearest earthly friend ; and even, when enjoying the sweetest intercourse with that companion, find our thoughts drawn away to a heaven of heavens in a sweeter and more intimate communion with our infinite and heavenly Friend.

There is one thing more in Christ as a Friend which, though of a different nature from all that has been said, does not yield in interest to it:—

We may do more for this Friend than for any other.

In your friendship and love, oftentimes your greatest trial is, you can not do for those whom you love all that you desire. Sometimes your relation to them is such that you can not do any thing for them — it is not suitable to offer your aid. How often do we hear of those whom we greatly respect and love as being in trouble, but we are not at liberty to tell them how much we feel, and how much we would rejoice to do, in their behalf. Now, there is not a friend, nor one whom you would feel honored to call your friend, who would esteem your greatest favors and kindness so much as Christ would to receive from you a cup of cold water. While there are bedsides and chambers where we would rejoice to linger, but can not come, we can nevertheless visit Christ in his sickness; we can go to him without waiting to be sent for; in prison we can befriend him; naked, hungry, a stranger, we can minister unto him. We can live for Christ; we can deny ourselves for Christ; we can “bring presents to him” at any time, large or small, or in the form of any thing valuable to us, and it will not fail to be acceptable and valuable to him; we can

leave all our friends for him, our home, our country ; we can suffer persecution for him, we can die for him.

Therefore, reminding him of his own words, how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," we may contend with him in love, and say that of his infinite love to us, — of which, indeed, we desire always to hear, rather than of our love to him, — it is a crowning joy that he permits us to do for him all that we desire, that he accepts that desire when the ability is inconsiderable, and that he is graciously pleased to give, as the reason for his acceptance of us at the great day, our poor but affectionate testimonies of love to him.

But leaving many things to be said in connection with particular illustrations of his friendship, as they will be presented in the following discourses, let us turn our thoughts, in conclusion, to the following truths.

1. *Whoever may love us, we can not be truly happy without the friendship of Christ.*

It is strange that we can contract earthly, short-lived friendships with man, which is a worm, and neglect and forget our infinite Friend. How eager we are in watching for the slightest encouragement to our advances of friendship and love from one whom the grave must shortly consume ! We read a letter again and again, to be sure that we are warranted in

our hopes ; the issue of our suit we feel will make us perfectly happy, or miserable. But have we ever sought friendship with Jesus Christ, sued for his love, waited and watched for tokens that we are "accepted in the beloved"? There will be an hour when, if every friend and every object of love were gathered together, you would forsake them all, press by them all, to reach Christ, and be assured from his lips that he loves you. O that men understood what is involved in having him for a Friend !

"His worth if all the nations knew,
Sure the whole world would love him too."

He makes a claim so great, so bold, that to every one who believes in him, it proves, of itself, his infinite excellence. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

2. We should be such friends to others as Christ is to us.

If we made him our pattern in friendships, and felt toward others and treated them accordingly, the effect would be, that we should certainly put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. We may suitably inquire, for the regulation of our feelings and conduct toward others, How does the Saviour deal

with me when I am at fault? Would Christ speak to me with the tone and manner with which I speak to others? Would Christ do things for me with the air or look with which I help others? If husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, if partners in business, if apprentices, if neighbors, if companions generally, if men and nations were such friends as Christ is to us, the Prince of Peace would reign every where. It will be so; it must be so; we who profess to be his followers must make it thus with ourselves, in all our private and public relations.

3. The greatest sin which is not unpardonable is, Ingratitude to Christ.

If we seriously consider what Christ has done for us, what he has suffered for us, what he has thought about us, what he is doing for us in heaven, how he has interceded for us when justice would have cut us down, with what consideration he treats us, how he bears and forbears with us, and that notwithstanding all that is past he is still wooing our affections by his mercies, his word, and his Spirit, and that he still desires to save us and have us for his friends, and then reflect how we have treated him, it would seem as though we could not keep back our tears.

The thought of coldness or ingratitude to a deceased friend who loved you in life and in death, is sometimes extremely afflicting. Christ is, in some

respect, like a deceased friend, whose death was caused by his love to you; and yet, perhaps, you have never requited his love with gratitude, never have gone with faith and love to his tomb, never have uttered a strong, impassioned protestation of your feelings toward him, as you so often do with regard to a deceased friend.

It is not uncommon to hear the name of the Saviour used profanely; indeed it is probably connected with oaths and cursing more frequently than any other sacred name, this being, as many feel, but erroneously, a step this side of taking the name of God in vain. What mournful evidence have we here of the baseness and depravity of man, that the name of his Redeemer is joined with ribaldry and angry passions! Still, they who do this, oftentimes are not the greatest sinners. Probably there is no such object of astonishment and sorrow to angels as a human being who, with a full belief in Christ as his incarnate God and Saviour, treats him with indifference and neglect. Paul, closing one of his Epistles, was seized with a sudden and overwhelming conviction of this dreadful wickedness, and abruptly exclaimed, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." That a man like Paul should thus express himself, that such an imprecation should be pronounced in connection with a dying Saviour's name, shows that indifference to Christ — merely not

to love Christ — is cause for the deepest shame and sorrow. We can not admit all that is declared in the Bible respecting Christ and his relation to us, and not see that ingratitude to Christ is surpassed by no other sin which comes within the reach of mercy.

Ambassadors are sometimes sent to contract marriages for royal persons with those whom they would affiance. We are ambassadors for Christ; and the great object of Christian ministers should be to join their hearers to him. In seeking to do this, a preacher once used these words for his text: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thy people and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy lord, and worship thou him." This invitation to receive the Saviour's love was accepted by one of the congregation, and, so far as the preacher has ever learned, by only one of them at that time. There was one whom the Saviour did then espouse, as though he did greatly desire her beauty. That individual was the only colored person in the congregation — a half-breed Indian. When she was examined for admission to the church, the pastor said, "What is your greatest desire?" She thought a moment, turned her eyes, suffused with tears, upon him, and said, in broken speech, "O, sir, to be joined to Christ!" That a sermon from that text should be employed as the means of joining her to Christ, that it should have had this effect with

her, and perhaps with no other in the assembly, illustrates what has already been said of the Saviour's disinterested love. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them." As you love to have your own intimations of regard and friendship promptly met and responded to with confiding affection, so treat Christ in the offer which he now makes to you of his love. Enter into an engagement, make a covenant with him, and an event will thus take place whose blissful history no pen, no tongues of angels, can describe. His offers may soon be withdrawn; he may turn from you and go away; death will come; others will take the happiness which might have been yours.

As you read in these discourses what a Friend Christ has been to some of every class and condition, to sinners of every name and degree, may your confidence, your love, your joy, in him increase, his name be to you as ointment poured forth, and the language of the redeemed church, the Lamb's wife, be yours: **THIS IS MY BELOVED, AND THIS IS MY FRIEND**

II.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW.

AND AS JESUS PASSED FORTH FROM THENCE, HE SAW A MAN, NAMED MATTHEW, SITTING AT THE RECEIPT OF CUSTOM, AND HE SAITH UNTO HIM, "FOLLOW ME." AND HE AROSE AND FOLLOWED HIM.

WE have before us a man of business at his accustomed place, and the Saviour of the world appearing to him there. He who bought us with a price uses his right to stand before us at the busiest hour, to come between us and the dearest earthly friend ; nor, in the midst of the most important and profitable transaction does he hesitate to absorb our whole attention and thoughts ; so that, whether he comes to make us his friends, or to hold communion with us, or to call us away from the world, he claims and takes precedence, in his right as Redeemer and Lord. While the appearance of Christ at places of business would to many be exceedingly unwelcome and embarrassing, to some of you at such places he is no stranger. In your busiest hours, and sometimes while conversing

with others, he is in your heart ; moments of peace and joy at the thought of him, sudden impulses of gratitude and love, generous deeds done in his name to his friends, letters written breathing his spirit, doing justly and loving mercy prompted by him, are proofs that you can reciprocate his gracious words, and say, "Where I am, there may also my" Saviour "be." May he be with you always, that you be not overcharged with the cares of this life ; to sustain you in trial, defend you in prosperity, keep you from the evil, make you bear his image, and amidst covetousness, injustice, and deceit make you to shine as lights in the world.

A man of business penned the words of the text. When you consider the honor bestowed on Matthew in being called by the Saviour to be his disciple, and think of the privilege given to him of writing the Saviour's life, and then read this unpretending account by himself of his call and appointment as a disciple, you may search long before you find a better instance of conciseness and simplicity. He does not say, As Jesus passed forth from thence he saw Matthew, — as though every one must needs know who Matthew was, — but "a man named Matthew." He tells us nothing of himself that would seem to make his call deserved, or that would take any thing from the free grace of Christ, for he tells us that he was found in his ordinary occupation as a publican. We

have no inflated description of the scene between Christ and himself, nor of his own feelings. He says, "As Jesus passed forth from thence," — as though he did not come on purpose to find him, which he surely did. This instance of modesty and simplicity is one of the incidental beauties of sacred history; a pleasant example of the true influence of religion in teaching us to be simple and unpretending in all things, and especially in speaking of ourselves; and, above all, to give God the praise of all that we have and are.

One of the most interesting paintings in the Museum at Antwerp is a representation of this passage. You see a man sitting at a desk, whose small apartments are filled with files of papers. Several men are doing business with him, and Matthew has in his hand a file of papers, searching for one of them, when Christ suddenly stands at his side, and says to him, "Follow me." Matthew, with his papers in one hand, and the other hand on the upper end, turning down the tops, looks round with surprise at the abrupt summons. The men who are doing business with him express in their faces a mingled surprise at the call, and a feeling of interruption in their interview with Matthew, and the spectator is left to imagine the feelings awakened in Matthew's mind by the omnipotent word of Christ.

The Saviour knew that Matthew's affairs were not of such importance, or in such a state, as to injure

himself or others should he that moment leave them, as the history informs us that he did. Luke tells us, speaking of him under the name of Levi, that "he left all, rose up, and followed him." He adds that he made for Christ "a great feast in his own house, and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them." So that his leaving all did not involve the unjust abandonment of his affairs, for it seems he returned to his house, and no doubt to his place of business, to do all that was proper; but forsaking his occupation as a publican, he left his property in other hands, or gave it away, and ever after followed Christ. We will consider, —

I. The sovereignty of Christ in selecting and calling Matthew.

Though this man had done nothing to merit our Saviour's selection of him rather than another, he no doubt had traits of character which qualified him for future usefulness as a disciple, but especially as a historian of the gospel; and these, we may suppose, were considered in his call. Sovereignty is not regardless of such things. True, it was sovereignty which originally created them; for what have we which we did not receive? But it is interesting to see, that as God regards his own established laws of nature in his providence, so there is nothing arbitrary or capricious in the bestowment of spiritual favors. Were it other

wise, effort would be discouraged, the present wise and wonderful adjustment of human agency and divine influences would be destroyed, and intelligent beings would be as irresponsible as the tides and winds. Enough is done to make us feel that God is supreme; that circumstances in no wise abridge his authority, and his grace sometimes triumphs over difficulties and rejoices against judgment where man would have pronounced it impossible or unsuitable. Still, the Bible and experience constantly show that order and law rule in spiritual affairs, that the government of God over us is one of motives, that effects follow causes as regularly, and indeed with more certainty, in spiritual things as in husbandry or handicraft; so that the highest motives to effort, and to the cultivation of good habits and the use of means, are constantly held forth. Though we can not look into the personal history of Matthew previous to his call by Christ, the Gospel, as recorded by his pen, shows that some natural or acquired fitness for usefulness was unquestionably among the reasons in view of which Christ called him from his occupation as a publican to be a disciple. Let us, for example, look at that wonderful system of ethics in the sermon on the mount, and think that it passed through his mind, was wrought into shape by the use of his faculties in the hands of the Spirit, was expressed according to his natural way of expressing himself, not in the cumulative style of Simon

Peter, nor in the meditative and pathetic tone of John, but in the clear, concise, didactic style precisely suited to moral precepts. He was qualified by nature and practice, by experience and habits, so to think and express himself that infinite wisdom found in him a fit instrument for this exceedingly important work of laying a foundation of moral sentiments for the whole superstructure of truth. We love and adore that divine wisdom which performs no needless miracle, which follows laws, which loves congruity, which finds rather than creates the instruments for its purposes.

But at the same time, if we could listen to Matthew's own account of his experience and feelings in this transaction, he would humbly tell us that he had done nothing to merit the Saviour's selection of himself rather than another; that he had no natural qualifications for usefulness as a disciple or writer of history above many others; the writing of the New Testament, as he would remind us, being directed by the Holy Spirit, bringing all things to the remembrance of the writer, superintending and guiding him, so that the book, with the evident impress of human qualities in the manner of its composition, should nevertheless be the authentic word of God. Others, as competent as Matthew, it is true, might have been found and used by the Holy Spirit for this purpose: so that the sovereign grace of Christ was put forth in calling Matthew, rather than any one of the thou

sands who heard the Saviour preach and followed him. To turn from them and go to Matthew's place of business, and give him this special favor, illustrates a prophecy respecting Christ: "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not." A certain lawyer came to Christ, and said, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Saviour gave him directions, but he went away sorrowful. It was in the Saviour's power to put forth the same almighty influence in converting him which he exerted in prevailing on Matthew to follow him. He saw fit, however, to set the truth before the ruler, and let him alone, to choose this world for his chief good, to live wholly for himself, and then forever to mourn over a useless, wasted life. When a certain man inquires what he must do to be saved, and Christ informs him, and exhorts him to do it, and he goes away sorrowful, and another man, sitting in his counting room, at the first call of Christ leaves his papers and customers and follows him, no one can say that the difference in the two cases was purely accidental.

We see the same thing in our religious assemblies. One hearer becomes concerned for his soul; the way of salvation is plain to his mind; but for some reason he is unwilling to do that which God requires in order to be saved. He is for some time in much uneasiness, anxious about the future, convinced that

he must be a Christian, unwilling to lose his interest in the subject of religion, and at the same time not willing to yield himself to God. His face is covered with sadness, sometimes his brow is knit with distress, and under solemn appeals his mind is like the troubled sea. Another hearer is impressed, goes home to his secret places, pours out his soul to God, immediately accepts Jesus Christ as his Saviour, has peace with God, and finds himself in a new world, while the same appeal has served only to make the other hearer irritated and unhappy. In each of these cases, the individual acts under no consciousness of compulsion on one hand, nor of hinderance on the other. What makes them to differ? The same grace which made Matthew differ from the very rich man, and Zaccheus from the man who wished to bid them farewell which were at home at his house. Some may say, this is owing to the difference in the dispositions of men; some are quick and resolute, others sluggish or timid. It is beyond dispute that these dispositions do always seem in some measure to modify the operation of divine influence, which falls in with established habits, good and bad, showing the vast importance of habits, and of a good natural character; but blessed be God, his mercy which is above the heavens is also above all dictation and control from our wayward or impotent dispositions. What hope would there be for ourselves and others without this truth?

II. *Cheerful obedience to the call of Christ is commended to us in the conduct of Matthew.*

Men frequently have a call from Christ as distinct and forcible as that which he gave Matthew. Few, if any, hear these words to whom Christ has not expressly and personally said, "Follow me." By a remark in a sermon, a line of a hymn, a thought or expression in a prayer, by a letter, the conversion of a friend, by affliction, he makes us feel deeply the importance and necessity of repentance and faith. Some yield to his call without delay. Some repel their serious thoughts. Others are made melancholy by their religious impressions. They will weep long and bitterly because they can not prevail on themselves to do their duty without delay. Too much seems to them to be required in the way of sacrifice in order to be a Christian; they would keep certain things which are felt to be inconsistent with spiritual religion; they shrink from certain duties which it will suggest and require; and still they remember the Saviour's direction, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Their mental struggle is sometimes protracted through a long period, and then most frequently ends in unconcern. In contrast with this, it is refreshing to notice the conduct of Matthew. Though Christ sent his almighty power with his word to incline his heart, still Matthew was not con-

conscious of it ; for divine influence never interrupts our consciousness of perfect freedom in our choice. As soon as the Saviour presented himself at his door and called him, Matthew, who, of course, had had some previous acquaintance with him, arose, left all, and followed him. On that countenance at his door there was such an expression as Matthew never saw on any human face ; there were blended majesty and love, authority and kindness in it ; the voice, too, was earnest and inviting, the whole manner of the divine speaker was irresistible. What were the interesting and all-absorbing scenes of business compared with the desire to have that man for his Friend ? When he had gone with Christ a little way, and the first excitement of the scene was over, no doubt his mind went back to his place of business, his affairs presented themselves before him, he thought of the sudden and great change which had happened to him. There he stood with Christ on one side of a stream, divided from many things which before had constituted his happiness. Probably he was never supremely happy till that moment. The promise had begun to be fulfilled to him — “He shall receive a hundred fold in this life.” By the side of Christ, with the consciousness of his favor, no king on his throne, nor lover of pleasure in his most delicious dreams, could be compared with Matthew at that moment as a happy man. Suppose that when Christ called him, Matthew had begun

to make excuses, or had said, "Go thy way for this time;" suppose that, upon the continued urgency of Christ, Matthew had begun to weep, and say, How little do I feel the importance of this call! I need first to have a new heart; I have never sufficiently repented of my sins to be a follower of Christ. Alas! I have no faith. I am too much engrossed in business; the world has possession of my heart—I will release myself soon from these cares. Suppose then that Christ had gone from him, leaving him to his business and gain. Sick at heart, every witnessing angel would have turned away, saying, "Thou fool." Should we not have felt compelled to say the same? And is there not within us something like Nathan the seer, saying, "Thou art the man"?

III. *We will consider the rewards of prompt submission and obedience to Christ.*

God loveth a cheerful giver. When we give him any thing, he loves to have us do it with the heart. When we give him our hearts, he loves to have us do it with all the soul, and mind, and strength. To share our affections with him; to yield ourselves to him hesitatingly, distrustful either of his willingness to accept us, or of his ability to make us happy, is not well pleasing to God. He would have us give ourselves to him with the same spirit of generous love with which he gave his Son to be the propitiation for

our sins. When one loves God in this way, promptly and cheerfully obeying his call and command, God bestows peculiar blessings upon him; for it is a general truth, applying as well to our intercourse with God as with men, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If we intend to be Christians, it will be a great thing for us to act promptly, with decision, unreservedly, and with earnest minds. Matthew was an instance of this. See the rewards that followed.

He was a companion of the Saviour during all his public ministry; he saw his wonderful works; he heard his gracious words; he joined in prayer with him; he walked and talked with Christ. Scenes of indescribable interest passed under his eye; and in the little family of Christ, going like strangers and pilgrims from place to place, he had enjoyment which the world could not give nor take away. However much he may have enjoyed these privileges at the time, we may suppose that when he was able fully to understand all that had taken place in the history of Christ, and as the work of human redemption unfolded itself to his view, his personal intercourse with Christ must have seemed to him like a trance, in which the unutterable things of heaven are crowded upon the mind, and afterward swell to such dimensions that it is not possible to express them. So it will be with him forever; the privilege of having been a personal

attendant of Christ during the Saviour's earthly life, will, through eternity, present itself to him increasingly with wonder and joy. But the time came when it was necessary that the history of Christ should be written. The Holy Spirit selected Matthew to be one of his penmen, enlightened his memory, brought back to his mind not only the acts but the most important words of the Saviour, and superintended, controlled, guided him in the plan and method of his history, in admitting and rejecting things, in correcting and finally completing the eventful and all-important record. It is pleasant to think what Matthew's feelings and enjoyment must have been, when, with a memory assisted by the divine Spirit, and with clear visions of all that passed under his eye, he wrote the account of the Saviour's deeds and words, hallowed by the endearing influence of separation from his adorable Master. Happy man! You might have spent your life counting money, and giving receipts, and laying up property to be the fuel for the last fires; but you gave yourself to Christ with all your heart, and became the historian of the world's redemption.

We have usually thought but little of this man. He is modest and unobtrusive in his record in speaking of himself, and the world has never thought or said much respecting him, though his name has been so often used, nor have we commonly preached about

him, because he hides himself behind his Lord and Master. But look at his claims to our reverence.

Is there any other such composition in human language as the Sermon on the Mount, from his inspired pen?

What passage stands equal in the Bible with any other for its interest and grandeur? Is it not the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew? "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Miltons and Shakspeares have never reached the awful grandeur nor yet the beautiful simplicity of the man who left his writing desk and the receipt of custom, with his soul filled with love to Christ. Wherever on the earth the gospel rises like the sun in heaven upon the nations, Matthew is the herald of his Lord. While meditating this sermon, I passed through the entry of the Missionary House in this city, and saw a pile of books which had just come from the press. Opening a volume, I read, "The Gospel according to Matthew," in the Choctaw language. The coincidence of the discovery with the preparation of this sermon on Matthew deeply affected me; I said, 'Here he is, on his way to the Indians of the new world.' When he left his receipt of custom so promptly to

follow his Redeemer, he little knew what glory and honor in being useful were involved in that one act. On his throne in heaven, he thinks of the influence which he has left behind him, and which is following him in tide upon tide of glory to the day of judgment and forever. Many a time he has thought of that moment when the countenance of Christ appeared at his place of business, and of the change which took place in his experience and history, when at the first call of Christ he gave up every thing to follow him. Let the amiable rich man whom Jesus loved turn sorrowful away, and another put his hand to the plow and look back, and another think supremely of them who are at home at his house; we praise and love, and may we imitate, him who instantly arose, left all, and followed Christ. "Them that honor me I will honor." "There is no man that hath left" all "for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred fold now in this time, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life."

If you will give yourself, with all your heart, and soul, and strength, to God, no tongue can tell how useful he may make you in this world, and what a happy eternity will be in reserve for you, and through you for many others. Perhaps in some humble condition, or it may be merely in teaching a child, at home or at school, you may set influences at work which will swell to widening circles through time. When

we think of the usefulness and happiness here and forever of being supremely consecrated to God, it seems strange to see people hesitating and afraid to commit themselves in this thing. Many under religious impressions are bitterly afflicted at the thought of being Christians. Instead of being about to find themselves heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, one would think that some great affliction was about to befall them.

The proposal is now made, that you, from this time, obey the voice of God by his Spirit and your conscience, and consecrate yourself to him, through repentance of all sin, and faith in the Saviour of the world. Never did any one become a Christian who did not concentrate all his thoughts and efforts upon the time then present. You are far more acquainted with Christ than Matthew was when the Saviour appeared at his door; you have been from a child familiar with his whole life, and with his sufferings and death. As you now sit and hear these words, there stands one whom you do not see, looking upon you with benign face, making offers of eternal importance to you. Strange, indeed, that he should think of you, that he should fix his desire on you; but this is like him, — he is seeking even you. Will you be a Christian? Perhaps you are inclined to say, ‘I must first repent and believe; and how can I do this at once, and without more premeditation?’ Repent-

ance is the sorrow of love ; you do not repent till you begin to love, neither will you trust in Christ till you begin to feel affection toward him. Therefore, if you will from this moment fix your thoughts on Christ, and give yourself to him, you will do that which involves all your duty ; — and what will Christ do for you ? — “ exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think ; ” but especially he will at once give you a new heart, which will have all right feelings in it, feelings which you have tried in vain to exercise, feelings which you never have had and never can have until you thus unconditionally, as poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, surrender yourself to Christ, and accept him as he is offered to you in his gospel.

Finally. *The history of Matthew teaches us that we make our own choice to follow or to refuse Christ.*

It has always been so ; it will be so with you. Sincerely and affectionately Christ said, “ Follow me,” to many who made excuses as freely as others accepted his call. Solemn truth, that whatever our destiny for eternity shall prove to be, each of us will have decided it for himself. Whatever else may be true, this is true, and nothing is true which is inconsistent with it.

It is affecting, also, to think that Christ does not urge us to choose him because he is in any way dependent upon our love and service. He will have no

lack of friends and followers, though we decline. The history of redemption will be perfect, even if it does not include the history of our salvation. It makes one feel insignificant to think that the happiness of heaven will be complete without him ; that regrets at his absence, the mention of his name, and at last the memory of him will be wholly absorbed in the blissful experience of the redeemed. A thousand years hence, a mother, a wife, a sister, a child, will still remember us if we perish ; but the myriads of myriads in heaven will be perfectly happy without us. Might there be but a harp hung up with the drapery of mourning upon it, a kind though sad memorial of me, it would be a continual drop of water in my future pain ; but there will not be a harp to spare for such a purpose ; there will be some redeemed sinner who will rehearse, upon those very strings to which my voice might have sung, the history of his gracious call by Christ, his happy choice at that call, its consequences in a useful life, escape from the company and torments of devils and damned men, and an eternity in heaven.

This being so, I would not pass the door of the place where you sit, I would not lose a moment, while Christ stands and waits for your answer, without yielding myself to his call. You may never have another. Will you be a Christian ? It will cost the surrender to Christ of all that you have and are ; it

will be a mighty change indeed that will make you willing to be a humble, affectionate, childlike believer in Jesus, and bring you, as the same change brought Saul of Tarsus, into the company and communion of praying people. Christ can make that change for you in a moment. Unless it is made, you can not be saved. Important moment ! a soul is now to decide whether to follow Christ or to refuse him. Future ages in heaven or hell ! your history with some soul will be but the continued history of this hour ! Saviour, hast thou no word to turn the scale ? — “ALL THAT THE FATHER HATH GIVEN ME SHALL COME TO ME, AND HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.”

III.

THE WIDOW OF NAIN AND HER SON.



AND HE SAID, YOUNG MAN, I SAY UNTO THEE, ARISE. AND HE THAT WAS DEAD SAT UP, AND BEGAN TO SPEAK. AND HE DELIVERED HIM TO HIS MOTHER.

IF there is one on earth who more than another is an object of sympathy blending with respect and almost reverence, it is such a one as the inspired penman calls a widow indeed. The death of her companion is not only the bitterest grief, but an abiding calamity, her sorrow inconsolable, her loss irreparable, and her journey to the tomb a pathway on which the cypress and yew tree suffer none but chance wild flowers to appear. God only knows the depths of thought and feeling which bereavement opens in the soul of such a mourner; and God himself has shown at once his sense of her unparalleled sorrow and his own condescension in giving himself the name of "Judge of the widow."

The woman mentioned in the text was probably

known in the city where she lived as a widow indeed, but whose bitter grief at the loss of her companion had been somewhat assuaged, because God had left her a son to be her stay and staff. On him that mother had bestowed the mingled affections of a parent and a bereaved wife ; he was the prop of her house, her defender and provider ; if not the image of his father, the memorial to her of him who in her youth was her joy and crown. It would seem that he had not yet found a home away from her ; dutiful and affectionate, he still devoted himself to her comfort ; she felt that the grave had not robbed her of every thing. But death is now in her house again, not to release her from a world of suffering, but to quench her last coal, to crush her heart with a more aggravated grief. She must follow her son to the place where the father sleeps, and henceforth divide, yet multiply, her grief between two graves. Her son, though young, was not a child. "There was a dead man carried out." He was known in the city. He was like one of the familiar shade trees of the place, which could not be struck with lightning without exciting the popular sorrow. All loved him as a widow's good son ; and when he died, much people of the city was with her. With the instinctive kindness of the human heart toward helpless and peculiar grief, they went with her to see him buried, but not one of them could say a word that could reach her

wound, not one of them could "by any means deliver his soul from death, or give to God a ransom for him that he should not see death, and that his eyes should be enlightened with the light of the living." They reached the gate of the city ; it was opened for one whose feet, they thought, would never tread its threshold any more. The opening prospect without the gate revealing to the mother the wide world in which she was now, as it were, a second time a widow, was the occasion of a new burst of grief. Remorseless death and the yawning grave heeded not her tears. On they went to bury the widow's son, and with him his mother's hopes and peace.

A little group followed by a crowd drew near, and together they met the funeral train. The funeral, indeed, was no uncommon sight, but there was something in the chief mourner's weeping, and in the whole procession, which moved even a common spectator. There was one in that group who had ordered the time and circumstances of his arrival at the gate of the city with a view to meet that funeral train. Undistinguished by any form or comeliness, yet to one who knew him his approach to that pageantry of death was fearfully sublime. He is death's great foe ; he is the Resurrection and the Life ; all that are in their graves are to hear his voice and obey his summons. Drawing near to the afflicted woman abandoned to her grief, he spoke calm words as only he

can speak, whether to the boisterous waves or the surges of the mind. The mourner felt that the stranger had power to comfort her like no one else, for with authority he laid a simple touch upon the bier, and they that bare it stood still. What a moment ! what silence ! what expectation ! With the same calm voice which soothed the mother, he spoke again. Who could tell what he intended to do, or why he should stop a funeral procession to which every passer, and vehicle, and military band of music, and shouting children involuntarily give respectful distance, and pass and suffer to pass in silence ? This humble stranger,—what will he presume to do ? He speaks : “ Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” No sooner were these words uttered than he that was dead sat up, and straightway began to speak. Incoherent, perhaps, were those words, like the last words of a dream with which a man awakes ; but they were words, and they made known that the dead was alive. But this was not enough. “ And he delivered him to his mother.” More is conveyed by those words than may at first appear. Christ did not retire, leaving the mother to awake as she might from the delirium of mingled astonishment and fear ; his work was not done ; he could not be satisfied till he had assured that mourner that her son was alive ; he stood by, without doubt, controlling the emotions of those hearts in which the sudden flood of joy might have destroyed

reason. "He delivered him to his mother," — and thus he loved them unto the end.

There can be no question that Death had done his work upon the youth who lay on that bier. The inspired writer says, "There was a dead man carried out;" and again he says, "He that was dead sat up." When Christ raised the ruler's daughter, he told them she was not dead, but sleeping. He never assumed to do that which he did not in reality do. The narrative before us makes it certain that the dead was raised. The departed spirit heard the Saviour's voice; from its separate abode it came forth, reëntered its deserted tabernacle, and lived on earth again. No human fancy can tell what its experience had been within the veil; but from the scenes which no man can see and live, it came back at the voice of Him who has the keys of death. No wonder that, as the historian adds, "great fear came upon all." There was a man, with every outward resemblance to any other man, extending his authority into the world of spirits, and calling back a departed soul from the state where death had left it and judgment was to find it.

We have no record of the ensuing life of this young man. While the Bible tells us of several cases in which the dead were raised, it says not one word of that which they saw within the veil. Curiosity was, no doubt, busy in the circle of their friends and fellow-citizens to learn something of their experience

No writer without the restraint and guidance of the Holy Ghost would have failed to gratify human curiosity on such a subject; it would have been prominent in his thoughts; he would have known that it was prominent in the thoughts of all above every thing else, and the history of this young man's resurrection would have been followed by a narrative of things which he saw and heard after death. The only impression which the narrative was intended to convey, besides its illustration of the Saviour's power, was the friendliness of Christ in his compassion to a widowed mother, which led him even to call back a departed soul, and thus restore to a widow her only son.

But in more ways than one is this instance of the Saviour's kindness and power capable of application to the condition of a widow, and to the son of a widow. Of all the sights that meet the eye, nothing goes to the heart of one who loves his fellow-men, with a stronger appeal, than the young men who are coming to the city from other places, leaving their parents' roof, the restraints of home, and subjecting themselves to the influences of a great place. When Paul enumerates his perils in the wilderness, in the sea, among robbers and false brethren, he speaks also of "perils in the city." If parents, ignorant of city life, knew one half of the meaning of that expression, they would have far less peace, their sleep would be

more frequently disturbed in thinking of these sons, and for a refuge they would be more instant in prayer. Yet shall it be forgotten that young men are converted and become eminently useful members of churches, in cities; that some who had continued impenitent under the most favorable and hopeful circumstances of a quiet, virtuous home in the country, find salvation amidst the snares and hinderances of city life? The almighty Spirit is not confined to places nor to circumstances.

If Jesus Christ should pass along our streets he would see in the warerooms, and counting houses, and in the great throng, many and many a youth who would excite his interest as much as did the youth on his bier, and for somewhat the same reason. Many of the young men among us are sons of widows, and who, in consequence of the death of their fathers, have come to this place to engage in business. The Saviour looks on these young men with a different eye from that with which many regard them; and to illustrate this we will now attend to some things which the narrative before us brings to mind. Consider, —

I. The thoughts and feelings with which Christ entered the city of Nain.

When people go to a city, their thoughts are full of the exciting objects which they see there. The contrast between the stillness of their own place of

residence, and the busy multitudes, and the noise of the place as they first set foot in it, absorbs their minds. Soon the glare of the place is all around them ; display meets them at every turn ; the streets are filled with living exhibitions of fashion and taste, the shops flash upon the senses their rich and showy offerings to the pride of life. Many, as they enter such a place, meeting a funeral, would feel a momentary sadness at the contrast of the sight with their own eager thoughts, now pressing on to mingle in the whirl of the city ; and some would wonder who it is that now no more can enjoy the pleasures of such a place. The noise of the slow hearse is not sooner passed away from their ears than the thought of death from their hearts ; and then the living tide and gulf of business and fashion receives them, like drops of rain, to mingle and be lost in it.

The Saviour entered the city of Nain with different feelings and thoughts, and was affected, and deeply so, by a sight which men generally avoid. The sight of a funeral in a city is impressive to a serious mind. The excitements of business and pleasure can not evade the arrest of Death ; beauty can not tempt him ; riches can not bribe him ; his throne is in the city ; his throne is in every village : on his realms the sun never sets. As the mourners carry the deceased from the noise and tumult of the city to the silent grave, one who has learned to conquer death by faith in

Christ can not fail to look upon the sight with deep interest. To the eye of Christ it was an affecting spectacle, and he drew near to behold it. His purpose in visiting the city was not to indulge in its opportunities of gain or pleasure, but to do the work of God; and when he saw the funeral his heart was moved with compassion. Another soul, for whom he was "slain from the foundation of the world," had gone to its last account. Death, his enemy and ours, had gained another victim in the city, and had plunged another house into mourning, and Christ could not see such a sight and not be more interested in it than by all which the world could offer to his senses. Do we not need the spirit of the Saviour in living in a city? What are the things that chiefly engage our thoughts here? If it be literature; if it be to buy and sell; if it be to admire or be admired, to imitate the fashions, to enjoy the concerts, and lectures, and shows; if it be to gratify the tastes, or to give children the accomplishments of elegant life, — we have abundant opportunities for all this here; but these are not most worthy of a Christian, nor are they the things for which we ought to live, nor with which our hearts will be chiefly filled if we have the spirit of the Saviour. The death and funeral of a widow's son here is a more interesting, important, and instructive event than any thing that charms the heart of the sons and daughters of a gay world. We must not

suffer ourselves to be lost in the whirl which every thing partakes of in the rush of business and population to the city. Here we are to serve God. Here is the vineyard which we are to cultivate. We must fix our thoughts on individuals, and not be overcome by the thought of multitudes, and so feel weak and inefficient. We may well say, as Jehoshaphat did at the sight of the legions of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, "We have no might against this great company, neither know we what to do." Our business is not to make the place at once what it should be, but to labor in individual cases to do the good which lies ready at our hands, while we coöperate gladly with every good effort to reach and affect classes. In order to do this, we must endeavor to feel and act like Christ as he went from place to place, and as he entered into cities. With our hearts fixed on heaven we must pass along, remembering that here we have no continuing city. With our minds filled with the importance of the soul and of eternity, we must have chief regard to the spiritual interests of men.

Before we reach the more specific object which the discourse contemplates, let us consider

II. *The discriminating compassion and tenderness of Christ.*

He saw this widowed mother as she bent in sorrow at the bier which carried her son. She could not

restrain her grief; it showed itself in all her motions, her bowed form, her unequal step, her involuntary pause, her disregard of every thing about her, and her whole abandonment to woe. He knew who she was, and whom she had lost, for he knew all things; and he directed his way to that city just at that time, to meet this funeral. "And he said unto her, Weep not." He noticed her weeping; he wiped away her tears.

There are few things in Christ more interesting than that appreciation of our condition and feelings which he showed when on earth. No friend is to you like one who, when you are in difficulty and trouble, perfectly understands your case. It aggravates an affliction to deal with those who can not enter into your feelings; who treat them with an inappropriate remark, or a smile, or with silence, it may be with coldness, or even with something bordering upon an unkind insinuation, or upbraiding; or who, if their intentions are good, are totally unqualified to understand you; or who inconsiderately rehearse long and circumstantial narratives of their own experience, or of things in which you can not feel the slightest interest. There are many who will sympathize with you; but it is rare to meet with one who is wholly congenial to your heart, who does not need to have you translate every thing, nor even to say all you think, but who will anticipate it by his actions, or

looks, or words, and make you feel that he knows you almost better than you know yourself. Such a friend is the Saviour. He is as near to us now as he was to any object of his compassion when he was on earth ; and while men change, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. There is not a circumstance in your condition, however delicate and private, but the Saviour knows it, and can appreciate it. There is no peculiar poignancy in your sufferings but he understands it, and pities you. There is no trial which you are unable and unwilling to explain to any earthly friend, which you may not lay before him, and he will treat you with a tenderness which none but God can feel. By the side of every sick and dying bed, in the chamber of protracted and exhausting illness, in every house of mourning, Christ is present ; and the strangest thing in our estrangement from God is that we think so little of what we chiefly need — the sympathy and readiness to help us which there is in Jesus Christ.

We have all received from Christ certain kind acts which made us very happy at the time, a certain gratification of our feelings, pleasing coincidences between our wishes and the events of life, and all of them from those hands which were nailed to the cross for us, and have ever since been raised to intercede for us. What effect have these things had upon our feelings and conduct ? Have they ever awakened in us strong,

impulsive love and gratitude, like great kindnesses from our friends? Have we ever felt as that grateful, happy disciple did when the large draught of fishes made his company say, "It is the Lord!" Beautiful instance of grateful joy and ardent love,— "he girt his fisher's coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea." Christ has done enough for each of us in our temporal affairs to make us throw ourselves, with the same impulsive feelings, before him, heedless of men's opinions or of what it might cost. If we knew what kind things Christ has done for us in that same spirit of compassion and tenderness with which he met this widow and made that bier stand still, we should think that we had very hard and wicked hearts to have neglected and rejected him. May our eyes no longer be holden that we should not see him. We shall need to know him in coming scenes of our lives. We shall meet with trials which no love but his can help us endure. We may follow a bier which, if Christ does not meet the funeral, will carry our hearts and hopes to the grave, and it will be the survivor that dies. Had we the universe to draw from to make you happy, we would do nothing but this, make you "to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

We are to consider, —

III. *The feelings and conduct of Christ toward a widow's son.*

Had he not been a widow's son, it is probable that Christ would not have raised him from the dead. Had Christ seen that mother sustained and comforted by her husband, he might have pitied them both, but he would not have felt as he did when he knew that this dead youth was the only son of his mother, and she a widow.

They who stand in the relation of widows' sons are objects of involuntary affection and interest to all who know them. Let men see a youth acting his part well in this relation, virtuous, frugal, circumspect, not ashamed of his amiable regard for his mother, but touched with a sense of her loneliness and sorrow, and doing all in his power to comfort and help her, and that youth has access at once to the confidence and love of men. It is not an unmeaning declaration, that "Honor thy father and thy mother" "is the first commandment with promise," and when God enjoins obedience to that commandment by saying, "that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth," he makes a promise, to fulfill which, in one instance, he raised a widow's son from the dead. For, if that young man had been a trial to his mother, would Christ have raised him to life? Rather would he not have suffered the funeral to pass on? It was the relation which the good son bore to his parent that

was recognized by Christ in this transaction ; and when a youth sustains this relation as he ought, he may be sure that he will have his Saviour's blessing in this world, and, if he also loves and serves the best of friends, in the world which is to come.

We know that young men naturally shrink from manifesting tenderness of feeling ; they feel that filial love or fraternal affection will give the impression of softness of character, and the want of a certain manliness to which the young aspire. None whose esteem is desirable think less of a youth who is susceptible to the influences of domestic ties. Others may think it strange that he runs not with them to the same excess of riot ; for many deem it manly to curse and swear, indulge expensive habits, and to be independent of all restraints ; and therefore the apprentice who will best ridicule his master, and invent the most expressive nickname for him, and show least of those compunctions of feeling which a virtuous youth feels from a regard to parents and sisters, to God and virtue, generally gets the most of their vulgar applause. That youth has most of true courage who will fear God rather than man. It is cowardice, and not courage, which leads the young to talk profanely and recklessly before others, to join in a laugh at the expense of men or things which he secretly respects, or to indulge in expenses or vices for fear of being called mean. He who fears God and seeks his appro-

bation, and therefore disregards the opinions and slurs of the wicked, is a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and that youth who is touched by a mother's love, and who remembers that absent parent amidst the perils of the city, not only has one of the greatest safeguards against evil, but shows himself susceptible of feelings which will make him beloved and honored among men. If you are a widow's son, you have not only the strongest inducements to be good, but the best of opportunities to cultivate feelings and sentiments which will form your character to much that is beautiful and praiseworthy, and to secure the notice and love of God your Saviour. That Saviour knows you, beloved young friend, and your widowed parent. Prayers unheard by you, tears which give place to smiles at your approach, are heard and seen by her Saviour, your Friend; and now, for her sake, he compasses your path and your lying down, and is acquainted with all your ways.

That widowed mother, we venture to say, is a Christian. Perhaps you are all to her that she can ask, except in one thing; and that one thing is of such a nature that every thing else avails her nothing till this is fulfilled. There is many a widowed mother who sees her beloved son advancing in life without God for his portion, and with no hope of heaven. He may be a most excellent son, but that can not save his soul. Christ says, "He that loveth father or

mother more than me is not worthy of me." The anxiety of that mother in her daily and nightly prayers for her son, as she thinks of his exposure to death and the loss of his soul, none but Christ knows or can fully understand. Many a time she has that son in her thoughts upon his bier, and is following him in imagination to his hopeless grave; and did not Christ draw near to her and support her in her fears, she could not endure her sorrow. If the son of a widowed mother wishes to give the greatest joy which earth ever knows, let him tell that mother that he has chosen God for his portion. A letter which should communicate such intelligence would be a greater treasure to her than the title deed to great possessions. Among her earnest thoughts and feelings she would say, 'Does his father know that he has become a Christian? What must his joy, even in heaven, be to hear that his son is now an heir of heaven with us!' We envy that young man who has it in his power to communicate such bliss on earth; to make a widowed mother feel that now she is the happiest creature out of heaven; to make a glorified father cast his crown at his Saviour's feet with a new tide of joy and gratitude which no experience in heaven has given him.

I hear a youth as he sighs and says, 'My mother is dead.' O, is she dead? Is your mother dead? Then you can not lighten her earthly sorrow by your conversion. But take courage; she is not out of the

reach of your power to make her happy. We fancy we see that mother in heaven, whose face, radiant with happiness, still seems to wear an expression as though she were expecting something more. They tell her, 'Your son has a happy home.' She is unmoved while she hears this. They tell her, 'Your son is rich ;' she hears it with an appearance of sadness. They say to her, 'Your son is eminent for his talents and acquirements ; his praise is on the lips of all.' How is this ? Can nothing move that parent which relates to your prosperity ? A ministering angel reaches heaven, drops his swift pinions at the door of her mansion, or finds her out in some celestial circle, and cries, 'Woman, behold, he prayeth !' Heaven for a moment now seems a heaven of heavens to her. Envious privilege of a child who can send such bliss into a parent's heart in heaven ! Happier he who by his timely conversion can keep a widowed mother's gray hairs from going down with sorrow to the grave, and smooth the dying pillow of her who smoothed his infant pillow and watched over his childhood, by giving her the assurance, as she enters heaven, that he loves and serves her Redeemer, that he will be useful here, and meet her before the throne.

O Saviour, hear the weeping and supplication of her whose son may at this moment be hearing these words. Behold him dead in trespasses and sins, forsaking the guide of his youth, his own friend, and

his father's friend, and the covenant of his God. Take him by the hand, and say, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." Come, touch this bier, which carries a widow's son to the second death. It is enough to be a lone, desolate widow. Give her this son, the joy and pride of him who was her husband and his father, but who has left her on this thorny pathway to the grave. Give her this son, that she may give him to thy service, and herself be comforted under thy stroke. Let not this funeral pass on in thy sight, and thou disregard our prayer.

Why do we say this? The Saviour has spoken; he has had compassion; he speaks at this moment to him who is dead in sin: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." The dead in sin hear his voice, indeed, but they can resist it, which the dead body and the departed soul can not do. Having compassion on that loving, weeping parent, the Saviour's hand is stretched out toward you. Avail yourself of a mother's prayers, and say, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my bonds.' He will raise you now from death in trespasses and sins, which is infinitely more important than the return of this youth in the text to finish the remnant of his years. Whether you now hear or disregard that word, you will one day hear it at your grave: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." What scenes, joyful or sad, and

whether greetings with no partings, shall take place at your family tomb, may depend upon your present treatment of the Saviour's call. "AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST SHALL GIVE THEE LIFE."

IV.

CONVERSION OF ZACCHEUS.

AND WHEN JESUS CAME TO THE PLACE, HE LOOKED UP, AND SAW HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, ZACCHEUS, MAKE HASTE, AND COME DOWN; FOR TO-DAY I MUST ABIDE AT THY HOUSE.
AND HE MADE HASTE, AND CAME DOWN, AND RECEIVED HIM JOYFULLY.

THE conversion of Zaccheus affords a striking illustration of the kindness of Christ as a Friend of sinners.

The man before us was the chief among the publicans. Of these there were two classes; one, an order of knights, respectable, and generally mentioned with honor. The other class were deputy assessors and collectors. They gave their bonds for a certain sum, and then, in many cases, enriched themselves by unjust exactions. A publican of this class was therefore odious, and the name was a proverb. Christ himself used the name in that manner: "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Theocritus, a poet, being asked which was the most cruel

of beasts, said, "Of the beasts of the wilderness, the bear and the lion, and of the beasts of the city, the publican and the parasite," or the designing flatterer. These publicans were for the most part foreigners. When a Jew became a publican, he was, of course, looked upon as a vile traitor, and was so abhorred that he was not permitted to enter the temple or engage in public prayers, and his testimony was not admitted in courts of justice.

Now, the man mentioned in the text, as we learn from the feelings of the people when they saw Christ enter his house, was one of these publicans, the principal of the extortioners; men knew him, perhaps, as the Shylock of Jericho; "and he was rich." In his personal appearance, it seems, he was below the common stature. Great talents at financiering have not unfrequently been associated with smallness of size, so that painters and poets have connected the two things together. If he were mean and wicked, his inferior personal appearance must have made him an object of contempt. But besides this, he was a Jew; not a foreigner plundering strangers, but one of their own countrymen hiring himself to their Roman masters, and making use of his office to oppress the Jews, his countrymen, and enrich himself. So that, all things considered, we shall not err if we suppose him to have been an odious character; a little, brisk, shrewd, cruel Jew, rich in ill-gotten treasures, and small as he was,

bearing sway among the herd of publicans through his intriguing manners, or the influence of his superior wealth.

This man had a desire to see Christ. "He sought to see Jesus, who he was." As Christ entered and passed through Jericho with a crowd of people around him, the excitement in the street caught the attention of this publican; but not being able "for the press," "because he was little of stature," to obtain a sight of Christ, he ran before the crowd, and climbed into a sycamore tree, and waited for his coming. He does not seem to have had any religious impressions, or any thing but a desire to see a celebrated stranger. The crowd soon came by the tree, and Jesus looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house."

This is not the only instance in which Christ showed his knowledge of one who supposed himself to be a stranger to him. "Nathanael said unto him, Whence knowest thou me?" There can be no reason to doubt that Christ knew who Zaccheus was without being informed, and the sequel of the story leads us to believe that the whole transaction was arranged by the omniscient Saviour for the purposes which will presently appear.

As Christ came to the tree, and looked up, and said, "Zaccheus!" we may easily conceive the surprise of

the man at the salutation. He little dreamed of being noticed, especially of being addressed by name, on the part of him whom all Jericho followed. As the Saviour paused and the crowd halted, there was one moment for the arch publican to think of his situation. It is not impossible that, with the inconceivable rapidity with which thoughts pass through the mind under sudden excitement, some disagreeable apprehensions seized him; and it may be his conscience awoke. Perhaps he thought that Christ had come to arraign him, and expose him to the populace. He was like one caught and bound fast; the tree was a pillory if Christ saw fit to use it for that purpose, and turn the indignation of the people against the sinner. At the moment when the eye of Christ was directed towards him in the tree, it were not surprising if his past life and forebodings of shame filled the mind of this transgressor.

The call of Christ was more surprising to Zaccheus than his discovery of him. We can hardly imagine the effect which the Saviour's words must have had upon him after his first painful alarm: "Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." Never could there be a more sudden and affecting change in the feelings of a man. A moment before he was like an arrested culprit, liable, at a word from Christ, to meet the scorn and indignation of the populace; now the Saviour's words of

kindness and confidence in him melted his heart. "Zaccheus, make haste and come down." But for what purpose? To meet the insults or reproaches of the people? "I must abide at thy house." 'With me!' he might have said; 'thou with me!' With what emotions must he have descended. "He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully."

Then, indeed, a strange sight appeared. There walked together the Son of God and the chief of the publicans; he "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," and the wicked Zaccheus, side by side. In silent doubt for a season, it would seem, this new object of the Saviour's mercy must have passed along, wondering whether it were a dream, and experiencing a conflict of feelings as he met the eyes of the people in his new and strange position. What joy there must have been in the presence of the angels of God at such a sight! What bitter feelings in the great enemy of Christ and man at the loss of such prey!

Christ went into the house of this sinner, and, with his disciples, became his guest. The crowd, as we infer from the narrative, followed him to the door; and we are prepared to feel the truth and force of the remark made by the evangelist with regard to them: "And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, 'That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.'" Was there no virtuous, upright man in

Jericho, that Christ should have chosen such a sinner for his host? Does he mean to set at nought public opinion by honoring a pest of society with his presence? Perhaps his friends, some of them, expressed their surprise and fears that he should be willing to associate with such a man, that he would so far risk his reputation with the people as to pay such needless attention to this publican and sinner. Many, no doubt, went back, and walked no more with him; and here and there a great moralist disdained ever after to follow a man who would seek the company of such a character. Zaccheus, no doubt, knew or could imagine what they thought and said; and, altogether, his feelings must have been a singular combination of opposite emotions which it would be hard to describe.

But it seems that the immediate effect upon Zaccheus of the Saviour's conduct toward him was, conviction of sin, unfeigned repentance, confession, and restitution.

“And Zaccheus stood and said, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

It was as though he said, ‘Thy kindness to me, a sinner, has broken and subdued my heart. I adore and love that goodness which treated me so infinitely above my deserts. I expected, for a moment in the

tree, to be exposed before the people, to have my sins set in order before my eyes. It would have been just and right. But, instead of this, I am selected from all the people in Jericho, and thou hast come into my house to be my guest. I can not withstand thy wondrous mercy. Truly thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Is this the manner of man, O Lord? Thy mercy is above the heavens, and behold, I am vile! Here I repent of my past wickedness, and shall make restitution. One half of all my property I now divide among the poor. I shall make it known that to every one whose property I have rated unjustly, and so have extorted money from him by wrongful assessment, I will pay back not only his proper demand, but fourfold.'

"And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, for that he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which is lost."

These words, no doubt, were intended to comfort Zaccheus, and assure him of pardon and restoration to the favor of God and to the confidence of the good. Though Zaccheus was a lineal descendant of Abraham, yet he was not, in the popular acceptation of the term, a son of Abraham, by reason of his former life and conduct, but, on the contrary, "a heathen man and a publican." But by his repentance, through the mercy of Christ, he was restored to the condition and

privileges of those who were called after the father of the faithful. Christ then added the explanation of his conduct in his treatment of Zaccheus, as though he said, The multitude wonder at me for my treatment of this sinner ; they little understand the purpose for which I came on earth. "For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which is lost."

There is great instruction to be derived from this narrative.

I. Divine wisdom was displayed in the conversion of Zaccheus.

"He that winneth souls is wise." When Jesus entered and passed through Jericho, on purpose, as there is reason to believe, to convert this sinner, there were many ways in which he could have done it ; but the way which he took to accomplish his object was singularly beautiful for its adaptedness to the end in view. The Spirit of God moved Zaccheus to ascend that tree, and so prepared the way for the call which was to be made to him.

Approaching the tree, Christ did not first of all turn the attention of the people toward him in a way to cause embarrassment ; nor did he for one moment mortify him ; nor did he make the most distant allusion to his past life ; and, indeed, it does not appear that in all his conversation with him, in the tree, by the way, or in the house, he said one word to him in

the form of reproach, or even reproof, but made his kindness and love the almighty instrument of breaking his heart. It is the highest wisdom in governing men and children, to make them govern themselves. We can imagine that kind, gracious voice, as the Saviour paused and looked up into the tree: 'Come, Zaccheus, I will go home with you as your guest.' Exquisitely beautiful was this stroke of divine skill; — not adroitness, for this savors too much of human artifice; — not tact, for this is too common and low a term by which to designate it; rather it was an instance of heavenly wisdom inspired by heavenly love. It began by the gratifying act on the part of a stranger of speaking the name of one who, though personally a stranger, was made to feel that he had some distinction or importance which made his name familiar, even to this distinguished visitor. But look at some of the words in the call. To effect the design it was necessary that there should not be much formality in the invitation. For if Christ had stood and said to Zaccheus, 'If you are willing to receive me as your guest I will go to your house,' it would have embarrassed him; many difficulties would have started in his mind; and at last, like a reptile or slave, he would have crept down from the tree. To save this embarrassment, and to put the man wholly at ease, observe that Christ throws in the words, *make haste*, as though it were already a settled thing that

he would go with him, and he need not embarrass himself even by accepting the proposal. The wise and gracious art had its effect upon the sinner: "He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully."

Christ could have rebuked Zaccheus, and so have brought him to repentance, as Peter properly rebuked Simon Magus: "O, full of all subtlety, thou child of the devil," and as Christ himself rebuked certain Pharisees; but he spared his feelings, and took him to his house; and one of the mightiest of the Saviour's triumphs on earth then and there took place—a triumph over one who, besides being a practised extortioner, was one of those of whom Christ himself said, "How hardly shall" they "enter into the kingdom of God!" Zaccheus will never, never forget, that instead of paining him by exposure, Christ took him into his company, under his protection, went into his guilty dwelling, and there, rather than in the street, and rather than by shame, there, in the retirement of his home, gently turned the thoughts of the sinner to himself, and led him rather than drove him to repentance. It would have been interesting to hear him afterward, as, for the first time in his life, perhaps, he called his family, if he had one, together for spiritual worship, and related all which that day had happened; how he went out in the morning a wicked man and an enemy to God, and how, accidentally, he climbed that

tree, and how he felt when Christ paused, and looked up, and began to speak to him, and when he found himself a moment after walking side by side with him, and how he condescended to come into his house to save the chief of sinners, one to whom he was under no obligation even by the slightest courtesy or by praying him that he would eat with him, but from all the people of the place, chose him, and that too when, by his prominence before the multitude, there was such an opportunity to treat him with marked displeasure. What a prayer that man must have uttered that night in the presence of his family ! Ministering angels might have paused over that dwelling to say, "Behold, he prayeth ;" and, if he sung a hymn, to learn that penitential song and rehearse it on their harps in heaven. There is a hymn whose sentiments and language would well have expressed the feelings of that new convert : —

" Lord, thou hast won — at length I yield ;
My heart, by mighty grace compelled,
Surrenders all to thee :
Against thy terrors long I strove ;
But who can stand against thy love ?
Love conquers even me.

" If thou hadst bid thy thunders roll,
Or lightnings flash to blast my soul,
I still had stubborn been ;
But mercy has my heart subdued,
A bleeding Saviour I have viewed,
And now I hate my sin."

II. *It is useful to put ourselves with any innocent motive in the way of Christ.*

It is well to bring others with us to public worship, and to the places where prayer is wont to be made, even when they have no interest in the subject of religion ; for such persons are sometimes most likely to be awakened. If any have a desire to know what spiritual religion is, while they are conscious of no special religious impressions or proper feelings, let them, nevertheless, be encouraged to visit the house of God and the places where Christians meet to pray. Zaccheus had no other feeling in climbing the tree to see Christ than bare curiosity ; but every ordinary thought or feeling with regard to Christ which will prompt us to put ourselves in his way is to be cherished, nor must we suspect or despise it though it be not all that it should be. If we would obtain religion, there are appropriate means to be used, as in every other pursuit. Riding, or sailing, or sleeping on the Sabbath, or strolling with idle company, has no tendency to make us acquainted with Christ. Put yourself under religious influences, be in earnest to gain heavenly wisdom ; wait at her gates, show zeal in seeking Christian knowledge, run before the multitude, climb the tree, obtain direction in your doubts and difficulties ; for if Zaccheus, from a mere motive of curiosity to see Christ, found eternal life, and if men who had confidence in him to venture and ask

for cures received forgiveness of sins, let us be persuaded that he will notice and cherish every desire, however poor and feeble, which is directed toward him. Zaccheus could not even plead the promise, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." His heart bore no sign of contrition; no spark of right desire had fallen into it. And yet his merely placing himself in the Saviour's path was followed by happy consequences which are never to end.

III. *The case of Zaccheus is an instance of sudden conversion.*

There is something highly encouraging in the truth of instantaneous conversion. Many are looking and waiting for the comfort and joy of an established hope in Christ through some process of awakening, conviction, anxiety, and final discovery of the way to be saved, such as they have known to be the experience of others. But, happily, neither this nor any other process is the essential way of becoming a Christian. Zaccheus went through no extended process of awakening and distress, which, in his case, would have been, as it usually is, struggles against convictions of duty, unwillingness to comply at once with the requirements of God. He went home with Christ; the thought of Christ's goodness to him touched his heart; such great confidence and love showed him his

own guilt in contrast, and inspired him with hope that there was mercy even for him.

You will be permitted to repent and believe on Christ in the same summary manner, if you choose. Nothing but unbelief, unwillingness to make that full surrender to God which Zaccheus made, has kept you, or keeps you this hour, from an experience similar to his. It is a great mistake to suppose that protracted anxiety is required of us, or that God needs to be influenced by many prayers and tears to bestow mercy upon us; for he is waiting to be gracious, and the more promptly and heartily we yield ourselves to him, the more acceptable is it in his sight. While we suppose that we must prevail on him, he, by his Spirit, is striving to prevail on us without delay to comply with his offers and promises. We say, then, that the truth of instantaneous conversion is highly encouraging, relieving you from the necessity of waiting for a future and more favorable opportunity; because "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach." Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God the Spirit can, at this hour, apply to you the benefits of that great sacrifice which God the Son has offered for your sins? Are you, alone, beyond the reach of his skill and power? or, must you labor with your wretched heart a few weeks or months longer to make it easier for the almighty Spirit to

change it? What if some sudden accident or sharp sickness should bring you in a few hours to the border of the grave? You would believe in instantaneous conversion then. It would be essential to your salvation that all which is done for you should be done quickly. Take courage, then, for you may at this moment turn to God; and, as you can not doubt the reality of a sudden and radical change in Zaccheus between the moment when he climbed the tree and the moment when he stood in his house and confessed and repented of his sins, so let the goodness of God lead you to repentance without delay, and of you it shall be said, "This day is salvation come to this house," and you shall be numbered forthwith among the subjects of the Saviour's power and grace.

But some say, 'Religion is the work of a life; it can not be acquired in a moment.' Religion was the work of a life with Zaccheus after his heart was changed; but it was not the work of a life to obtain that change of heart. A single tide occupies six hours; but there is a moment when that tide ceases to ebb, and begins to flow. In all great experiences and events there is one decisive moment; in retracing the steps over a very long, mistaken road, there is a first step backward, the result of a conviction and a resolution. If instantaneous conversion by the almighty grace of the Spirit be impossible, what melancholy and despair would attend our approach to many a dying bed!

But now we can say, "Be of good cheer;" had you lived a religious life, you would need at this moment to come, as you must come now, to the feet of sovereign mercy, and be saved without money and without price. There is hope; God is not willing that you should perish; only believe; remember the penitent thief; lay hold on Christ; "he that believeth shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

IV. *The history of Zaccheus shows how lost reputation, in certain cases, may be perfectly retrieved.*

Leaving out of view those cases in which public offences have been followed by punishment at the hands of the law, in which it is necessarily far more difficult to satisfy the community that repentance and reformation are not merely a natural effect of the punishment, or assumed as the only chance of removing outlawry, we will confine ourselves to cases in which men have fallen from virtue in some notorious and shameful transgression, have been exposed, have used falsehood to screen themselves, have been detected in their lies, and are left defenceless with a blasted character, the objects of mingled scorn and pity. In such cases men are generally regarded as wholly lost. They are, indeed, desperate cases; but must these men despair?

If they seek to associate with respectable men, they

are shunned ; if they crave employment, they are denied ; if they purpose to outlive their shame, and struggle out of their degradation, the laws of human society and the laws of their own nature baffle them ; the conviction is forced upon them that for this world they are ruined. The philanthropist, the moralist, the man of wealth and commanding influence, should they try their skill to raise and restore such men, would be compelled to despair.

There is a door of hope even for these men, ruined, cast out, and trodden under foot of men. One Friend remains to them ; they have a Friend, and he is the best of friends ; a Friend who not only can give them right feelings, but can turn the hearts of all men toward them, not merely with relenting, but even with confidence and love.

The method by which this Friend will restore and save them, if he undertakes to do it, will be by leading them to feel in such a manner toward him as their God and Friend as will make them happy to confess in the fullest manner ; to humble themselves before every foe, to make restitution and reparation at any cost, and to feel that the world knows all of which they have ever been accused or suspected. Their sense of acceptance and peace with God will make every thing easy, and even pleasant, which before would have been beyond endurance, or impossible.

In this manner, the kind and merciful Saviour

dealt with Zaccheus. He first gained his confidence by publicly owning him as a companion ; nay, as a host, receiving kindness from him. Let any man, in his own apprehension and that of others, ruined and friendless, be assured of this, that his sins, his meanness, his lying, his fraud, have not alienated from him that one Friend, who, ‘when we were yet without strength, died for the ungodly,’ who penetrates the deepest and darkest wilderness into which remorse may have driven a guilty man, and rejoices more to save him than over the whole company of the righteous. Let him read in the New Testament how this Friend selected extreme cases of guilt and shame, to illustrate the depth of his compassion. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief.” If God the Saviour does not cast him off, why should he fear ? “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” “Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Probably there was not a happier man in Jericho, or Judea, than Zaccheus at the moment when he stood before Christ and made confession. Doubtless he said within himself, ‘Men have known me as avaricious and an extortioner. They shall know me henceforth in a different character. I crucify my avarice, and share

my all with the poor. When men hear that Christ has been in my house and I have become his disciple, a thousand taunts and insults will descend upon me. I will meet those whom I have injured, and those who may have hated and abused me. I shall demand the privilege of making confession and restitution and of humbling myself before those who have justly charged me with crime, even though they have unnecessarily or wantonly abused me. I will acknowledge all, forgive, and seek forgiveness.'

He parted at once with half of all that he had, to "give to the poor." Out of the other half he promised to pay each one whom he had injured, fourfold. We see him passing along the street. What confidence, what love, what kindness mark the varying expression of his face. He has a different air and manner; it almost seems that he has added to his stature since yesterday. Instead of skulking about, afraid or ashamed to meet men, he goes to some who he knows fear or hate him, and bids them behold in him a new man. What scenes of confession on his part, of weeping on the part of those whom he grasps by the hand. The joy of heaven over him is not so rich as his. Not waiting to be called upon, he goes to one and another, — the widow, the orphan, to all whom he has wronged, — receives forgiveness, has peace with his own conscience and with God.

Let some one who has fallen into the deepest disgrace

with his fellow-men simply accept Jesus the Saviour as his Friend, and he can not refrain from repentance and confession. Instead of its seeming to him like a scaffold, it will excite the deepest and richest emotions to confess and make reparation. He will have a proper conscious superiority to those who have accused, or convicted, or abused him ; being able then to meet them with a spirit which will not only satisfy them, but will disarm and subdue every feeling of hostility. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

There are cases in which it would not only be needless, it would be wrong, for a man to disclose his sins. Let him make all possible reparation as privately as the nature of the case will admit ; but if he is not known to others as having injured them, he might injuriously throw away the reputation which God has kindly preserved for him. Justice may not require that he should make confession to a fellow-man, unless an innocent person should be suffering punishment, or be under unjust suspicion on his account. Even here, it may be, the innocent may be delivered, and the penitent transgressor retain his reputation with men ; at least, let him by no means needlessly expose his sin, if he can satisfy all the demands of justice. Yet if the burden be too great to bear alone, if it would be a relief to make the disclosure, if a family and friends would not have pain and shame

inflicted on them, some way will offer itself in which all the demands of conscience, as well as justice, may be answered without further injury to the transgressor.

Finally. *There was one moment in the life of Zaccheus when his history for eternity was decided.*

The day when he met Christ was an accepted time, a day of salvation. He might have hardened his heart against Christ, as the Pharisee did when Jesus ate with him, and that Pharisee spoke harshly of Christ and of the penitent woman who brought her box of ointment to anoint him. Zaccheus might have said, 'How much I must confess, how much I must expose myself, how much I must lose, if I become a Christian!' It was a solemn and important moment; Christ would probably never come so near to him again, never again tell him that he must abide at his house. The balances for eternity were hung up, and the sinner, by the grace of God, weighed his eternal salvation against his shame and his gold. Happy decision! This day, among the blissful scenes of heaven, he feels the consequences of that choice.

If you are at this moment interested in the subject of religion, it may be as important to you as eternity can make it, that you come speedily to a right conclusion. Suppose that Christ should suddenly appear in this house, and passing near the place where you sit.

should cast his eye upon you, saying, "To-day I must abide at thy house." Are you willing to have Christ come into your house? You know what it cost Zaccheus. When Christ comes into a man's house by his love, the barred and bolted heart opens its doors, the treasures fly abroad, the secret sin, the long-standing quarrel, the iniquity of the man's calling are confessed and forsaken. All this is done under the influence of feelings which make the man supremely happy. Are you willing that Christ should come into your house? When you open your door on your return home, think, 'The Saviour has come here before me, and is waiting for me to welcome him.' When you shut your door to-night, and think, as you do it, whether all the family are within, ask yourself, 'Is the Saviour within? Or am I shutting the door upon him, and locking it against him, as I have done every night before?' There he stands, there he has stood, till "his head is filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night." While you sleep, he will not depart. He longs to abide with you and bless you; and while dwelling with you he will be preparing a mansion for you in heaven, where he will dwell with you forever. Make haste, then, and receive him joyfully.

V.

WHO TOUCHED ME ?

AND JESUS SAID, WHO TOUCHED ME ? WHEN ALL DENIED, PETER, AND THEY
THAT WERE WITH HIM, SAID, MASTER, THE MULTITUDE THRONG THEE
AND PRESS THEE, AND SAYEST THOU, WHO TOUCHED ME ?

AND JESUS SAID, SOMEBODY HATH TOUCHED ME ; FOR I PERCEIVE THAT VIR-
TUE IS GONE OUT OF ME.

As Christ was on his way to the house of Jairus, whose "one only daughter lay a dying," the people, knowing what his object was, and curious to see the miracle, thronged him. Among them was one who had been sick twelve years. Medical skill was baffled with regard to her. All her property had been spent in paying for fruitless aid. Unseen, disclosing her intention to no one, she came behind Christ, and touched the border of his garment, for she said, "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole." Quick as thought, her sickness fled. No medical opinion was necessary to assure her that she was well. She felt that she was healed of her plague.

"And Jesus said, Who touched me ?" With an

inquiring look he seems to have put the question to all who were nearest to him, and to have received a denial from one and another. "When all denied," he appeared still unsatisfied; so that Peter, always ready to speak, gently remonstrated at his asking such a question in a crowd; "Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" "It would rather be strange that some should not touch thee; and what importance can there be in the circumstance that some one of us has accidentally and unavoidably touched thee?"

With a tone of determinateness, and as though there were some great importance in the thing, the Saviour replied, "Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."

Of course, the Saviour knew all that had happened, not from any force in the touch, for it was only the border of the garment which had felt that pressure. He knew the secret thoughts, the faith, the cure of the woman, and raised the question, "Who touched me?" and pursued the inquiry for the purpose of drawing attention to the act of faith in that humble person. Matthew says, "And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing." All this was one of those innocent stratagems which we all use at times to arrest attention and heighten the effect of a disclosure. "He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to

prove him, for he knew in himself what he would do." In each case, this had the desired effect. But the woman, fearing and trembling, and knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace."

The instruction which we may draw from this is, —

I. *There is great difference between thronging and pressing Christ, and touching him, with faith.*

There were, perhaps, fifty or a hundred who, in the press that day, were in close contact with Christ, and it may be hundreds more thronged him and would come near to him to gratify curiosity; and there were many times when eager hands were stretched forth or lifted up toward Jesus; and yet there was among them all but one touch, and that the most gentle and of imperceptible force, which drew the attention of Christ, or obtained any thing from him. There were loud, open professions of respect, protestations of confidence, earnest desires that he should do some great work, that the people might see and marvel; from the eagerness of many, one would have thought that Christ was their best, their only Friend, that they were ready to be his disciples and follow him; and there were, perhaps, some of great note, for whom the crowd opened and let them pass in, and who saluted Christ

with respect, and ostentatiously showed their patronizing disposition toward him, and exhorted others to approach him to be healed; and some there were, perhaps, who publicly defended him, and resented the calumnies which were heaped upon him; and no doubt many cried after him to come and heal them. While all these things were passing on, one obscure woman comes near, and merely lays her finger on one of the four fringes which, as you will see in the fifteenth of Numbers, the Jews were required to wear on the four corners of the outside garment, which was one whole piece of cloth. No breath of the wind, no insect lighting on it, could have given a more imperceptible touch to that garment; but that touch was more than all the noise and shouts, the outward respect and worship, of the crowd. Christ did not say, ‘Who is he so eager to obtain a sight of me; who is that distinguished personage, who that devotee, so demonstrative in his prayers;’ no,—but, “Who touched me?” “Somebody touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.”

Many, very many, are ready to throng and press Christ, who never have rightly touched him. All our respect for his name, our belief in his Godhead and atonement, our love for public worship, our interest in the music of the sanctuary, or in building the sanctuary itself, our enjoyment of social meetings, our outward attachment to the cause of Christ and to his

friends, our eulogies of the Christian religion and its institutions, — all this is well; but all this may be, and yet we may never have touched Christ with so much as the finger of our faith.

Many will say unto him, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works?” and others, “We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” And Christ will say to them, “I never knew you.” But a poor, humble sufferer, unknown in the crowd, not even informing Christ what she was doing, approaching from behind, and not from before, may, with her finger, touch the border of his garment; and wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world, that which this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her. What does this mean? We hear some say, ‘I have been suing at the mercy seat for months or years, waiting and hoping to be heard, employing all my means of obtaining salvation, and am never the better, but rather grow worse; and yet here is one, who, in the most gentle, simple manner, obtains Christ’s love in a moment; and not only so, but straightway takes her place in the Holy Bible as an example to the whole world how to believe. Lord, help me to believe! Lord, increase my faith as one grain of mustard seed; for surely it removes mountains; it brings the soul to Christ; it brings Christ and heaven

into the soul.' — We may derive further instruction from this passage.

II. *Simple faith in Christ is all which is necessary to salvation.*

There is nothing more remarkable, and, to human reason, more incredible, in this woman's cure by touching the hem of a garment, than there is in the true and only way to be saved, and in the eternal consequences to every soul of simply believing in Christ as she did.

Had one asked the whole council of doctors who had prescribed for the woman, and to whom she had paid all her property, whether touching the border of a garment would cure her, they would have thought that insanity or idiocy had come upon her. What connection is there between being healed of a malady which the medical skill of Jerusalem can not remove, and touching the threads of a fringe?

Now, the act of faith which saves the soul is no less wonderful, and to the eye of reason no less incredible. We are told that one simple, heartfelt feeling of trust and confidence in Jesus Christ as an atoning Saviour, delivers the soul from all spiritual ignorance, makes one know more of God and spiritual things in one day than the study of a lifetime without it could acquire. And that is the least of its effects. That one act of believing is in the stead of angelic, spotless

righteousness, which the law of God requires of every subject of God's government, or denounces endless ruin in case of failure. Yes, the law of God demands perfection, — never to have failed in one point, — angelic purity, angelic obedience, angelic love, in short angelic holiness, — and the law has no provision in case of failure, but the soul that sinneth it shall die. Just as our law, He that commits murder shall die, has no remedy for the murderer, so the law of God has no remedy for one who is not as perfect as an angel. Now, instead of a life without sin, instead of angelic perfection, there is a justification provided: and what is it? Simply this; If a sinner will feel toward Christ, with regard to his soul, as that sick woman felt toward him with regard to her sickness, he shall be saved. This is the gospel, and the whole of the gospel, "Believe and thou shalt be saved;" "He that believeth is not condemned;" "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Nor is that faith, to human apprehension, some great thing; something which the soul itself, or any spectator, would regard as at all adequate to the object sought. With a proper sense of our helpless need, it is all contained, or may be all contained, in one exclamation, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," or in a single sigh, "Lord, save me," or a simple act of love and trust, such as this woman performed. This can save the soul.

We often hear the question asked by intelligent, thoughtful persons, people well educated, accustomed to reason, highly accomplished, ‘What is religion? How am I to know, among so many sects, what I am to believe?’

We will suppose that such a person means, by religion, the Christian religion. And we will suppose further, that he means the religion of Protestants. The religion of Protestants, — what is the thing, underneath all their forms and the various peculiarities in which they differ, in which they all agree? There is one thing; and having found this, a man may suit his taste and belong to any communion, and if he but have this one thing, he will be saved; this one thing is religion; without it, nothing else is religion; every thing else is the covers of a book, and this is the reading; the shell, and this is the kernel; the lamp, and this is the flame. And what is it? Simply this; A guilty, perishing soul committing itself to Christ as an atoning Saviour. That is religion, the religion of the whole Protestant world who accept Christ as a divine Redeemer. It is a great mistake that there are essential differences among Christians who receive the Bible as wholly inspired. They all differ in things which do not affect the question of salvation; and they all agree in this, that the essence of religion is to accept Christ with a sense of our need, as sinners. A man may study and labor to make something more of

religion in its commencement than this, but if he does he will not succeed. A miner does not care for the quartz stone which holds the little piece of gold; that small, yellow particle in the stone is the object of his search. And so it is with the pearl of great price; it is independent of all human additions and notions in which time has embedded it; and religion is simply this, for a sinner to commit his soul to Christ, as this woman committed her cure to him in her simple act of touching him; “for she said, If I may touch but his clothes I shall be whole.”

But we are taught further by this narrative, —

III. *There are preparatives for faith.*

It may be said, ‘If believing in Christ be such a simple and easy thing, why can I not believe at once, and be saved? I have tried to believe in Christ, but hitherto without success.’

There are preparatives for faith. Yes, as there are preparatives for cure, and healing, and rescue, so there are preparatives for faith. Preparatives for cure and healing are being sick, or wounded, and feeling the need of remedies. You may recommend the best medicines in vain to one who has no sickness; the physician is not sent for till the patient feels that he needs him.

When the jailer at Philippi was putting Paul and Silas in prison, suppose that Paul had said to him,

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” This would have been wholly without meaning to him; or, had he perceived any meaning, he would have treated it with contempt and rudeness. But the earthquake shook the prison house, opened every door, loosened every man’s bands. The jailer awoke, and seeing every door open, and the prisoners at liberty, drew his sword to take his own life, supposing that the prisoners had effected an escape, and knowing that the prison keeper’s life was required if his prisoners fled. It was not the earthquake alone that convinced the jailer of sin; this aroused and alarmed him; but Paul’s kind words, “Do thyself no harm, for we are all here,” were an equally powerful means of grace. ‘Is that the man whose feet I placed last night fast in the stocks? Does he refuse to escape when God has given him leave?’ As the innocence of Jesus was the means of converting the penitent thief, so, in part, the honorable conduct and forgiving spirit of Paul, no doubt, awakened the jailer to a sense of his guilt; and now he is ready to hear about Christ. Now he calls for a light, and springs in, and comes trembling, and falls down before Paul and Silas, and brings them out, and says, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” He had had preparatives for conversion; and these were, a sense of his lost and ruined condition and despair of help. Then he was prepared to receive Christ.

So the woman in the text had preparatives for faith in Christ by twelve years' experience of fruitless help from physicians. Hope deferred had made her heart sick ; she saw her property melt away ; one new physician had encouraged her to expect from him a cure ; and she was sinking into the grave. These were the preparatives with her for saving faith. So that we may say, in general, that the preparatives for faith are, a deep conviction that Christ alone can help us, and a persuasion that he must save us or we perish. These preparatives every sinner has before he believes. We may not be twelve years in getting them, and we may be twenty, or fifty. We all employ useless means of salvation, some for a longer and others for a shorter time ; we get convinced that Christ alone can help us by first proving the emptiness of every thing else. When the prodigal son "had spent all," he said, with penitence, "I will arise and go to my father." When the woman in the text "had spent all," she arose and came to Christ. How strange this is ! Men never come to Christ but in the last resort. He whom they should seek first, and love most, is always the last whom they think of ; and yet he is never offended, but his love is just as full and just as free as though he were our first choice. The reason why any of us have never come to Christ is, we have not yet spent our all of self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency, and worldly ease, and our "Soul, thou hast much goods

laid up for many years," yet sings us to sleep; and we have not been near enough to hell's brink by some sickness or accident, or by the flash of light disclosing it in the death of some impenitent relative or friend, or the restless, dissatisfied mind which has no peace but like the troubled sea casts up mire and dirt, has not yet brought us to despair of ever growing better; yet we may be sure of this, that when we find ourselves sinking in the billows of death, then, if not before, then, but perhaps too late, we shall see the utter inefficacy of every other help, and call on Christ. O that we may all do it while it is an accepted time. So soon as we go to Christ, like this woman, persuaded that he alone, by his righteousness and strength, can save such sinners as we are, then we have the preparatives for faith. Preparatives for faith are just the preparatives for effectual begging at your door: 'I am poor, I am wretched, I have been directed to you; help me, or I shall have nothing to eat, and no place for my head.' Such begging never failed with you; and such begging by you at Christ's door will never fail.

Here let us notice a difficulty and an objection. Some, who are all ready to come to Christ, say, 'I have never repented of my sins. The awakenings, convictions, and remorse which others speak of, I never have felt, but I must feel them before I come to Christ.'

Now, it is an interesting truth, that coming to Christ in the way described implies repentance, conviction, remorse, and godly sorrow. You may not know one of these by those names ; but when a poor, despairing, and loving soul casts itself on the Redeemer's mercy and help, what better sorrow for sin and repentance can there be ? This is the very best of conviction and remorse, and we desire no other for you. Only come to Christ as a perishing sinner, and give your soul to him, and that involves every thing else. So that you need wait for nothing ere you come to Christ. But your coming will be repentance and faith together ; your coming will be conviction of sin and godly sorrow. The experience that has prepared you to come to Christ in this way has done the work of conviction and repentance in bringing you to him. Hence Paul's direction to the awakened jailer was at once this : "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

IV. *This woman affords us a striking illustration of our duty to come to Christ, without waiting for him to come to us.*

Are there not some of my hearers who have been waiting long to receive grace from Christ, professing that they are ready, and wondering at his delay ? They are as this woman would have been, had she said in her impoverished home and on her bed of lan-

guishing, 'Christ has been to other houses ; he knows that I am sick ; I have sent messages to him, and told him where I live, and have asked my friends to remember me in their prayers to him. I wonder that he has never been here. I shall die, if he does not come. Others have been healed. I suspect I am not ordained to be cured. If I am to be healed, I shall be,' — and such like common and well-known complaints.

See her, on the contrary, never having received one special word of encouragement from Christ, so far as we know, but persuaded from what she has heard others say of his almighty love and power, see her humbly, and yet earnestly, pressing her way through that great crowd to get to Christ. 'I pray you, let me pass,' she says ; and they wonder at her, and, perhaps, are rude to her ; or one and another, struck with her sick look and her eager efforts, make way to let her in ; 'O, if I may get near enough to reach him, it is all I ask ; I do not seek to speak to him ;' and so she stretches out her emaciated finger, which for twelve years had counted out gold and silver to the physicians, all for nothing, and she bends or reaches forward and touches the Saviour's garment. She had no questionings about decrees, and the secret purposes of Christ, and being elected to be cured ; nor would she wait for Christ to see her and call her ; and herein consisted, in part, the greatness of her faith, and herein she is unlike

very many who are waiting God's time. This was coming to Christ; and it speaks with a most affecting voice to those who feel and even say, as some do, 'If Christ will give me any pre-assurance that he will save me, I will come to him.' This keeps many from being saved; they insist on feeling sure that they are saved before they come to Christ; they wait for him to do all the work before they move, and such persons will wait in vain. We are free agents; there are some things which God can not do for us; he can not believe for us. Believing does not consist in seeing a thing with the eyes; hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? But believing is what many would call venturing, or presuming, or taking for granted, risking, trusting, taking the first step. So we perceive Christ's directions are, "Come;" "Come unto me, all ye that labor;" "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."

If we are ever to be saved we must come to Christ. There must be an act of trust and confidence, as if it were self-moved; and yet there can be no question that the Spirit of God drew that woman to Christ, and Christ himself had arranged the whole plan of that mercy, while she seemed to do all herself. So we work out our salvation, while it is God that worketh in us.

There is further instruction in this case: —

V. Salvation follows instantaneously upon believing in Christ.

This truth, about which there can be no question, is of great interest and importance. No sinner ever believes and then, a few-hours after, or in weeks or years following, obtains pardon. No ; the moment a sinner believes, the work of justification is done ; as quick as thought, “He that believeth is passed from death unto life.” By the very act of your trusting in Christ, God can be just, and justify you ; all your legal disabilities are removed, and there is no condemnation for you. All your sins are blotted out at once, like a thick cloud ; at once you are an adopted child, and so an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. Should you truly believe in Christ at the midnight hour, and die while the clock is striking that hour, you would go where the penitent thief went ; and why not ? Should you live fifty years after that, and be the best Christian in the church, would your good life help Christ in saving you ? make up a deficiency in his merits ? “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” Sanctification is progressive ; justification is instantaneous. What a gospel this, and what a Saviour ! Being persuaded of your need of Christ as the Lamb of God, and relying only and wholly on him, you

trust in him ; and so doing you are saved. “He that believeth shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” Not only shall we be saved from wrath through him, but we are made holy, created in Christ Jesus unto good works ; we are at that moment, born ; born into a spiritual world, with all that belongs to the nature of a child of God.

So this woman, whose example illustrates faith, did not return to her house and wait for her cure, but with the touch sensations of unwonted health took possession of her ; she perceived that she was healed. As a simple touch, with true faith, saved her wholly, and saved her at once, and as one look at the brazen serpent healed the bitten Israelite in the wilderness, so the least act toward Christ which implies faith is followed instantly with his great salvation.

We often hear it asked by an inquirer, ‘How shall I know when I am accepted of God?’ If you come to Christ with such renunciation of every other dependence, and with such confidence that he is able and willing to save, and with such an entire surrender of your soul to him, as this woman felt, you, too, will feel as she did, that you are healed, straightway. If one believes and does not know it, as some do, it is because they continue to expect answers and wait for Christ to reward their faith. This is not the strongest kind of faith. It is not unconditional. It is more like partial payments than a transfer of every thing

at once, with a feeling of utter bankruptcy. What right has a sinner to require that God should return him something for his faith? He must do his duty, and leave himself, to be saved or lost, in the hands of God. His only concern should be, 'How shall I make recompense for my sins? How shall I get into my proper place before God as a sinner? How shall I comply with his requirements?' With this feeling of self-renunciation, which exalts God and makes our happiness comparatively of no account, we begin to see that God, for his name's sake, can pardon and save us; that help has been laid on one who is mighty; and his merits then taking the place of our poor faith as the procuring cause of pardon, we feel that our "sins are forgiven for his name's sake." Hope springs up in the soul; that "peace with God" which comes from "being justified by faith" ensues, without an intervening moment; for if hope does not come immediately upon believing in Christ, it is because we have not sufficiently despaired of any other help, or we are selfish, and think more of our happiness than of God, and of our ill desert, and wish to make a compromise with him, instead of doing like the men of Calais, who, in token of submission to the king, put ropes about their necks, and went forth barefoot to his camp. Let us feel that endless banishment from God is our just desert; let us take the punishment due to our sins; at the same time let us plead the

sacrifice made for us by God in Christ, and leave ourselves in those wounded hands which have never suffered one despairing soul to perish.

The last thing to which I would call attention, briefly, is this : —

VI. *There is nothing which Christ seems to love so much as faith in him.*

Once he was so much affected by it that he seemed to forget the patient for a moment, and, turning, said to those around him, “ Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel ; ” and then he proceeded to say that many should come from the east and west, and sit down in the kingdom of God, while they of whom faith was chiefly to be expected would be cast out. He loves to say, “ Thy faith hath saved thee.” “ According to thy faith be it unto thee.” To this humble suppliant in the text he said, “ O woman, great is thy faith.” Christ went through all this scene of inquiry as to who touched him, in order to bring to notice that poor woman, as an illustration of faith. How natural this is ! When we have made great efforts and ventured every thing for an object, and men come and repose confidence in us, nothing is more gratifying. Think of the infinite interest which Christ must have felt in doing and suffering all which he did ; and now, when one and another comes and lays his soul, for eternity, in his hands, and before

heaven, earth, and hell, acknowledges him in his office as Redeemer and Saviour, there is joy in that Redeemer's breast. Have great faith in Christ if you would awaken his deep interest in you; especially do it in the act of intrusting your soul to him—in the first effort of faith. If some of us could have the opportunity which you now have of believing on Christ for the first time, of coming in darkness and with trembling, and saying, 'I am thine; save me;' if we could do this now, with all which we know of Christ, it appears to us we would do it as we desire to behold it done by you, with unconditional, unfaltering trust, and without a moment's delay. Do not wait for him, but go cast yourself, just as you are, at his feet. He will know it; if your faith in him be confident and you are abased in your own eyes, he will know it instantly among the multitude of worshipers in heaven and on earth. "Who touched me?" he will say, bending his look toward you; "somebody touched me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." You will perceive that you are not hid; you will fall down before him with a penitent, believing heart, and he will say, "Son, daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

VI.

THOMAS.

THEN SAITH HE TO THOMAS, REACH HITHER THY FINGER, AND BEHOLD MY HANDS, AND REACH HITHER THY HAND, AND THRUST IT INTO MY SIDE; AND BE NOT FAITHLESS, BUT BELIEVING.

THOMAS, probably, has had as many imitators since his day as either of "the twelve." The imitators of the impulsive Peter, only, might equal them. For the human heart is naturally inclined to one of two extremes — presumption or despair; and it is only the grace of God, in connection with a well-balanced mind, which keeps us from them.

In company with his fellow-disciples, Thomas had had complete proof that Christ was crucified; that nails were driven through his hands and feet, and a spear forced into his side; that he had been taken from the cross, laid in the tomb, and a great stone rolled before the door. That Christ was dead and buried was to him as certain as that he had ever seen him alive.

Within three days from the crucifixion, the disciples were assembled in secret, and the doors were shut for fear of the Jews. Judas had gone to his own place, and Thomas, for some reason, was absent. Jesus appeared and stood in the midst of them. Needing no opened door, he might have been supposed to be a spirit or apparition ; to convince them that it was he himself, he showed them the prints of the nails and the spear, and while they believed not for joy, and wondered, he ate before them, to place it beyond all possible doubt that he was not a spirit, but was still in the flesh.

When Thomas came to the next meeting of the Apostles, and was told by them that they "had seen the Lord," he may at first have supposed that they had been to the tomb, and had seen him as when he was first laid there ; but he was assured that Christ had personally appeared to them ; whereupon he may have entertained the supposition which they themselves made, that his spirit had appeared ; but they testified to his eating before them, to their handling him, and to the prints of the nails and the spear. In the first place, no impostor could have assumed such wounds ; and in the second place, Christ would not have labored as he did to make demonstration of his bodily presence, had he been only a spirit. All this, however, was lost upon this disciple. "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my

finger in the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

We can not hesitate to pronounce this unbelief, under these circumstances, unreasonable. Ten men, whom he knew, declared with unvarying testimony that they had seen Christ alive, in his original form and person. His acquaintance with them must have convinced him that they had no wrong motive in their assertion; and he could assign no reason for not believing them, but the seeming impossibility of the thing. But that impossibility appeared as great to them as to him; they could judge as well as he of the evidence, which, in their view, outweighed the improbabilities. It seems, however, that their assertion was without effect. Thomas refused to believe except upon actual sight and touch. We can not commend him in this thing. Caution, and freedom from credulity, are commendable; but a state of mind which can not appreciate clear proof, is not good. We are not informed of any particular cause of this state of mind in Thomas; whether he belonged to that sluggish class of minds which do not feel the power of evidence so early as those around them; or whether he was extremely averse to every thing out of the ordinary track, especially to the supernatural; or whether he was obstinate, and would not believe because his brethren were earnest to convince him, or because they touched his pride by their wonder or pity

at his hesitancy. If the latter were the case, his words were a retort upon them, intimating that when he too had enjoyed the palpable proofs which had been afforded them, it would be time to upbraid him if he should not believe. But perhaps the crucifixion had destroyed his hope and confidence in his Master, and he therefore may have absented himself from the company of the disciples, unwilling to be connected further with that which had raised, only to destroy, such hopes.

But all these things together formed no good excuse for not receiving the testimony of ten men to an alleged occurrence, in which they had had the evidence of eyes, and ears, and touch.

There was something extremely interesting, however, in the character of Thomas, notwithstanding this unbelief. When the disciples sought to dissuade Christ from going into Judea to see Lazarus, who was sick, by saying to him, "The Jews lately sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" and when Christ persisted in his intention, Thomas said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." This was not said of Lazarus, for Christ had just declared that Lazarus was dead; it was a beautiful and affecting instance of devoted attachment to Christ. His language, when Christ had appeared to him, and had satisfied him, shows a heart capable of strong emotions; so that we probably err if we place

this disciple among the cold-hearted, the sceptical, or even the timid. A man who was the most forward among the twelve to suffer martyrdom with his Lord, and that, too, not by a general profession, but in one particular scene of peril, and who emboldened the rest by his courage, surely vindicates himself from any charge of timidity. Still we can not praise him for "not believing them which had seen" the Saviour "after he had risen." He should have been slow to admit uncertain evidence on so vital a subject; ready as he was to die with Christ, and, no doubt, for him, he can not be blamed for requiring sufficient grounds for venturing into that martyrdom which, nevertheless, he would not shun; but still it is injurious — indeed, destructive to the cause of truth, human and divine — not to believe in view of suitable evidence; it is ruinous to personal comfort and improvement, and may be fatal to the soul.

Few things in the conduct of Christ, as a Friend, are marked with greater kindness than his treatment of Thomas. At his next interview with his disciples, when they were assembled "and Thomas with them," after the salutation, "Peace be with you," it seems as though the eye of Christ rested upon Thomas. It was not for reproach, nor for reproof, nor was it a cold, retributive look; nor did the Saviour then pass him by to speak to the rest, leaving the incredulous disciple to amend his error. He knew what Thomas

had said ; and then, instead of rebuke, he condescends to give him the required proof: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands ; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing." We may venture to say that it was not merely the satisfying proof which Thomas then received, but the affecting kindness with which it was afforded, that made him exclaim, with a degree of faith which seems to transcend all the previous attainments of the disciples as to their knowledge of the Saviour's deity, "My Lord and my God !" If all the traditions of this man's intrepidity and usefulness in Parthia, Persia, and India were true, they, nevertheless, could not surpass that one act of faith in these words which, under the circumstances, was truly sublime. "My Lord and my God !" No reproof, no check is given to this divine worship, but, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed ; blessed are they which have not seen and yet have believed."

Perhaps there are few things in which so many will appreciate kindness in Christ, or feel that he is more truly a Friend to them, as with regard to difficulties in believing. It will accord with the spirit and intention of this instructive act of kindness on the part of Christ, and with his accompanying words, if we consider some of the various forms of unbelief on the subject of religion, the difficulties which hinder faith, and endeavor to see if, after all, Christ has not in each

case done as much to help our faith, and with equal forbearance and kindness, as in the case of Thomas.

I. Some are not satisfied with the evidence for the truth of the Bible.

They have been exposed to the cavils of unbelievers, in books, or from pulpits, or from lectures, or in their early education, or from bad company. But what should constitute satisfactory evidence that the Bible is, as it professes to be, from God? The answer is, The same that would satisfy us in any other case. The testimony of a sufficient number of witnesses, competent as to understanding, and with opportunities for knowing that which they assert, and of unimpeachable honesty, should be received in relation to things which address themselves to the senses. The witnesses to the truth of the Bible are the Apostles, some of whom wrote a history of events, things which they saw and heard, which the others never contradicted. They had no worldly motive in making these assertions. They lost earthly favor, were persecuted, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and crucified, and yet persisted in their testimony as to the things which they said they had seen or heard. Several of them have given us histories of Christ; in these there are certain discrepancies which do not affect the history, while they show that the writers did not combine to make a story and palm it upon the world. Had they

designed to do so, one of them would not have said that "the thieves" who were crucified with Christ railed on him, while another, with that record before him, made mention of only one that reviled. They would have been careful, had they been writing and publishing a fiction, to make it correspond in every statement of facts; but the few unessential discrepancies in their several histories show that there was no craft nor dishonesty. Besides, had they asserted things which they had merely thought or felt, imprisonment and torture would have corrected their mistake in some instances; all would not have been fanatics in sight of crucifixion; but the things to which they testified were things to which they professed to have the witness of their own eyes and ears, and it is incredible that they should have been tormented to death, and not have confessed imposture if they had not seen and heard those things which they related. From some of them, in moments of weakness and fear, the truth would have been extorted; but they sealed their testimony with their blood. We do not see how a fair mind can resist such evidence.

But admitting it, what follows? That Christ was the Son of God, and that he commissioned them to publish his gospel. If so, the New Testament must be the word of God; and since these inspired men declare that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that holy men of old in writing the Old Testa-

ment spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, it follows that the Old Testament is the word of God. So that if we believe these Apostles to be honest men, the Bible is the word of God ; if we do not believe the Bible to be the word of God, we must reject the evidence of the Apostles' honesty; and if so, to be consistent, we must reject every thing which rests on human testimony.

Christ might appropriately address every one who hesitates to receive the Bible as the word of God on such testimony, for substance as he did Thomas. He might bid him reach his finger and behold the hands of one and another Apostle who suffered crucifixion in full knowledge of the awful nature of that torment, rather than admit that the things which he had seen, and heard, and preached were not true. Let the histories of those times be examined, and it will be found that the New Testament was written by men whose honesty is proved by their voluntary sufferings and death. But how can one who rejects the New Testament read other histories with any confidence in their truth ? How can he know, upon his principles, that any book is authentic, genuine, or credible ?

II. Some are not satisfied with the evidence for the doctrines of the Bible, as commonly received.

We should determine what the Bible teaches, as we judge with respect to any other book.

Was the Bible written by those who profess to have written it? If we believe this, we are to ascertain what it teaches by finding what is its general tenor. This, however, is to be added: the Bible professes to be a revelation—not a history of things previously known, but a revelation from God. All that we are to seek for is, ‘What does the Bible teach?’ Here is the important office of reason. Its general tenor, as in all other books, must decide this question. Have you examined the book for yourself? Do you or do you not find certain truths there? No matter whether our teachers assert or deny these things, or whether they are above reason, or, as we may erroneously think, contrary to reason. Do we or do we not find them asserted in the Bible, judging of its language on the same principles upon which we judge of the meaning of a common book, or of human language in any form? If you do not find them there, no man has dominion over your conscience; to God you must stand or fall. For, if by the ordinary rules of interpretation, such as we use in reading any book, the language of the Bible does not convey to your mind these truths, you are responsible only to God for your conclusion. If we find these doctrines there, unbelief of them, on any ground, is unreasonable. You would receive the witness of men in any matter however incomprehensible and contrary to experience, affecting your life, if it were much less clearly estab-

lished. The doctrines of Scripture have one great truth for their centre, viz., that Christ died for us. Belief in them, therefore, is not a mere speculation. With regard to any one of these truths, Christ might appeal to you, by the evidences that he was wounded for your transgressions, not to reject it as you value your soul.

III. *Some do not receive the promises and threatenings of God, as contained in the Bible.*

If you believe that the Bible is the word of God, there is no reason that will abide the scrutiny of truth, nor of the last judgment, for not receiving the promises of God, and believing and fearing his threatenings. If God, therefore, promises pardon upon repentance and faith in Christ, and we do not believe him, we have no excuse. If he declares his willingness to forgive all our sins, and we can not trust him; if Christ declares himself able and willing to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him, and we withhold confidence in these words, we are unbelievers. If he declares that the wages of sin is death, and that the wicked shall finally perish, and we are not practically affected by these things so as to forsake sin and turn to God, we are guilty of unbelief. What testimony would we have? We should not be persuaded though one rose from the dead. What clearer, stronger language could even he employ?

IV. *Some are not satisfied with the evidences of their acceptance with God, and on this ground neglect certain Christian privileges and duties.*

Satisfactory evidence of acceptance with God should be the correspondence of our feelings, in view of religious subjects and objects, with those of good men in the Bible. Take the history and writings of those men, notice their feelings in view of their sins, in view of God, and with regard to the Saviour of the world. Do we find that we have now, or that we have ever had, such feelings? Consider the conversation and the prayers of those who give evidence of being Christians. Do our feelings upon religious subjects agree, in the main, with theirs? Again,—

Are you conscious of a sincere endeavor to do the will of God? Are you influenced to duty because God requires it? Do you endeavor to abstain from evil because God forbids it? In a word, does the will of God, so far as it is made known to you by your conscience and his word, constitute the chosen rule of your conduct? If an affirmative answer to these questions is forced upon you by your conscience, and you still neglect to act as though you were a Christian, you may be guilty of sin, unless you are so incompetent to act in view of evidence, that you are not responsible for what you do. There are some that are compelled to admit these things; they disrelish things which interfere with religion, yet they have never

done their duty as Christians, because they are able to doubt; and because they can doubt, they think they are excused. Some appear to feel that it is modest to be distrustful and diffident; some, that it is humility to deny the evidences of their Christian faith, and of what God has done for them. It is extremely dangerous to trifle with our Christian hope. "We are saved by hope;" when we lose it, the anchor is lost. Some who, if they would be decided, and act in view of the evidence which they already have, would be rooted and built up in Christ, may, in consequence of timidity or irresolution, and neglecting known duty, suffer much from despondence, and lose great opportunities of being useful. Besides, we can not tell when and where doubts and fears, which result from humility, cease, and criminal unbelief begins.

In all the cases which we have considered, there is a want of reasonable faith. The evidence is such as should satisfy the mind; but for various reasons some remain sceptical and careless respecting the word of God; some have strong prejudices against the doctrines of the Bible; some refuse to admit the promises and threatenings of the word of God; and some refuse to acknowledge the evidence of God's grace in their souls. It was no word of commendation when Christ said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

To all these the following truths will be appropriate:—

1. *Faith is peculiarly acceptable to God.*

The man who is called, by way of eminence, “the friend of God,” and on whom, more than upon all who ever lived, God bestowed commendation and blessings, was one who was preëminent for his faith. Every consideration was opposed to faith and obedience, with the exception of this—God has commanded. On the strength of this command, he obeyed in a transaction which cost him the sacrifice of his parental love, for he received Isaac from the dead; he had gone through with all the sufferings which belonged to the separation up to the moment when God stayed his hand. It was he who, at the word of God, left his father’s house, and went out, not knowing whither he went. The deeds of those great and good men and women enumerated in the eleventh of Hebrews, were acts of faith. The reason why God places such value and honor upon faith is evidently this: Faith is the only means by which God can secure our obedience and love. We can not see him; if we could, there would be little room for faith. Placed as we are in a world where we must act with reference to unseen objects, faith is as necessary to their influence over us as the atmosphere is essential to the influence of the sun upon the eye. Without faith, God has no way of influencing a responsible creature except by force, which he will not employ with our minds, even to secure or prevent any thing

which would be for our greatest good or injury. His authority over us, therefore, is annihilated where there is no faith, or, it is reduced to the authority which he exercises over inanimate things. Even when his Spirit changes our hearts, the object, the effect, is to "work in us the work of faith, with power." Hence every thing in his intercourse with us has for its great design to promote faith, and the more this prevails in us the greater is the connection and intercourse between us and him. That there is nothing arbitrary in this great stress which is laid on faith is evident from this, that we are well pleased with it in those over whom we have authority. In no way do children, and pupils, and servants show their confidence in us, and attachment to us, more than in things which prove the strength of their faith. So when the centurion illustrated his faith in Christ by speaking of the soldiers under him, and of their faithful obedience, and made use of them in humbly arguing against the necessity that Christ should come under his roof, the Saviour, deeply affected by what the man had said, turned from him to those who stood near, and commended his faith, warning the Jews, by this Gentile, that they who had the strongest reasons for faith would be surpassed in it by many of the heathen, and fail to be saved. Other cases in which Christ commended faith, readily occur to the mind. We are told by an Apostle that if severely tried, and proved sincere,

it will “be found to praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

Picture to your mind Thomas bidden to examine the hands and side of Christ, and, in contrast, the woman who came behind him and touched him. Most unlike were these two cases, and the feelings which governed them; one was the approach of unbelief, the other, of faith; and far different were the feelings and words of Christ to these two persons. We sympathize with Thomas in being treated, perhaps, as an unreasonable child by a judicious and kind parent who makes indulgence sometimes a powerful rebuke. We covet the joy and the reward of the humble woman whose faith was such as the Saviour blessed.

We are prepared to see, therefore, that —

2. Want of faith is peculiarly displeasing to God.

The leading sin of which Christ said the Holy Spirit would reprove the world was, “because they believe not on me.” It is moreover said, in answer to a very important question, “This is the will of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” And again: “He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar.” The threatenings of the gospel are chiefly directed against unbelief. If we refuse the evidence of God’s being, of his word, of his truths, when we have received the knowledge of them, we disown the authority of God, and we see the consequences in the

fate of multitudes in that generation who came up out of Egypt with Moses. In vain do we plead diffidence, or humility, or fear of presumption. There are some things which we must believe, or we must perish.

3. *The consequences of unbelief upon the character and happiness are melancholy.*

When we do not act in view of evidence, but allow ourselves to doubt and speculate, we resort to a great variety of books and teachers in hope of relief; but, like cross lights, they confuse the subject; we get into deeper perplexity, with no foundation, no boundaries, nothing settled with regard to truth and error. If there is an intelligent being in a more deplorable state than another, it is one who seems to understand every thing, but believes nothing; who can furnish an objection against every truth; make his ability to doubt, or the doubt expressed by some one else, a reason for not believing, and whose mind is loose and chaotic on the subject of religion. There are those among them who are preëminently to be pitied — those who are sceptical about their own characters as Christians, who steadfastly deny that they have experienced any religious exercises of mind, and, with awakened consciences and keen sensibilities, persist in shutting the door of hope against themselves because they demand more vivid evidences of those things which they think they are required to experience.

But how are we to distinguish between presumption and faith, between credulity and belief upon good evidence? Suppose that Thomas had put such a question to his brethren. His fear of being credulous, his preconceived conviction that the resurrection of Christ was impossible, his depression and even despair at the Saviour's apparent defeat, and the ruin of his cause, were mental operations of whose justice and propriety he could not be so assured as ten men were of having heard Christ speak, seen him eat, and of having seen prints of nails in his hands and feet. Why should the impressions of such things on his own mind be more correct than on theirs? Why should they be duped, and he prove to be the only reasonable man of the eleven? For every reason, it would have been right and good that he should have yielded to such testimony as they furnished.

It will assist faith to consider that, —

4. *A good conscience is essential to faith.*

“Holding faith and a good conscience, which,” viz., a good conscience, “some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck.” Perhaps we never knew a case of apostasy from the truth which did not begin in the heart and practice, in the commission or the purposing of a secret or open sin. The conscience being violated, the truths of God's word must be denied; for a guilty conscience and the truth together,

make hell. If we find one denying any essential truth which he once believed, we may be sure that he never practically believed it; or that he has grown cold in his religious affections, and fallen into some snare; that he has committed, or is wishing to commit, some transgression, to enter into some unsuitable relation, or in general to rid himself of religious restraints. That which is the cause of apostasy is also a preventive of faith. If we do wrong, we can not expect to have faith. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Hence repentance is required in connection with faith. If we live in sin, if we willfully neglect duty, we can not receive the truth; it would torment us. Very many doubts and difficulties with regard to matters of faith proceed from an evil heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."

5. It may help us to believe, if we begin with defining and settling one truth after another.

When a place for building is loose and unfit for a foundation, piles are driven; the ground is strengthened; the beams may then be laid. The deliberate settlement of one truth after another, is like this fixing of a foundation; we should begin with things which are plain, hold fast to them, and add to them by degrees, seeking competent instruction, and, being convinced, act upon those convictions if agreeable to the

word of God. We should undertake this as an indolent, neglectful man, whose business is in confusion, would, upon reformation, begin to bring his affairs into order. If we leave our personal hopes and prospects in an uncertain state, and sickness and death surprise us, we are indeed a melancholy spectacle, drawing near to eternity, in darkness which is relieved only by glimmers making it still more fearful, and still perplexed as to the way of salvation. "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness." If the Bible is the word of God, the only written revelation which we are to receive, the authentic message of God to man, it is a truth of infinite importance, and we should know it; if its doctrines are true, they relate to our future, eternal interests; if we are Christians, what else is comparatively of any importance, and if we are not, would we gain the whole world to lose our souls? The obedient, faithful followers of Christ will receive 'light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Bunyan, in his 'Holy War,' represents Diabolus assailing Mansoul with an army of forty thousand 'Doubters.' There are no more



formidable enemies than those which are represented under this figure ; there seems to be no end of them when they once get possession of us ; they confuse every thing, they take from us even those things which we had supposed were immovably fixed.

But if, notwithstanding a clear persuasion of our duty, we find ourselves embarrassed, with no real interest in religion, seemingly incapable of feeling or acting correctly, and yet persuaded that we are in the wrong, there is one thing which we can do with certain success. The Saviour of the world is a Friend to the unbelieving ; for he is the Friend of sinners, and unbelief creates peculiar necessity for his power and grace. Only let us be willing to be taught by him, and to “receive with meekness the ingrafted word,” as a tree receives any graft which the husbandman sees fit to insert, however foreign to the nature of the tree. As we sometimes wish to disclose our mental troubles to an experienced, skillful man, who will disentangle our thoughts, and show us how to take the first step in thinking and feeling correctly, we may go to the Saviour of men with our difficulties and perplexities, to him who, in the wilderness, was tempted with the casuistry of Satan, and knows how to succor them that are tempted, who is the light of the world, and whose readiness to help us is illustrated in his kind treatment of Thomas. See how the faith of that disciple rose in a few moments from be-

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low the common level to the very height of confidence and love. ‘So would mine,’ you say, ‘if Christ should do some special act of kindness to me, as he did to him. Blessed indeed was he,’ you think, ‘to have had his doubts thus wholly removed.’ But Christ did not consider him so ‘blessed’ as you esteem him. “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” Here is a gentle reproof, an intimation that he did wrong in not receiving competent testimony, a disparaging of the virtue in believing that which is forced upon us by demonstration, and a commendation of those who exercise the reason which God has given us to assist our faith, and who, without requiring palpable evidence, believe.

While this is our duty, it is also true that in proportion as we are thus inclined to feel and act, God reveals to us views and imparts feelings which are his special gifts. For there is nothing which is more peculiarly the gift of God than faith, so contrary is it to our natural disposition, which is against God and spiritual things; and its effects upon the mind and heart are so beyond the ordinary operations of the understanding. So, if one is wholly set against a certain temptation to which he feels himself peculiarly liable, he finds an unaccountable deadening of his sensibilities or a strong repugnance to the sin in a

moment of surprising assault by it, making him feel that it is not merely the force of habit which saves him, but that God has made a way for his escape. So that here, as every where in the dealings of God with us, we see illustrated the necessity and use of means, and also the coinciding power of God working in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." 'Both to will and to do.' It is one of the deep things of God, and ought to be a source of satisfaction and gratitude with us, that God can 'work in us to will,' and leave us accountable and free. Instead of caviling at it, and being jealous, we should love to say, "We are the clay, and thou our potter." The more that God does for us, the more conscious are we of voluntary effort; as Paul says, "striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." The father of the child which was possessed with a devil understood this doctrine without the aid of metaphysics. "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said, with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Perhaps he mistook his desire to believe, for faith; it was an innocent mistake. A heart strongly moved with desire to know the truth shall never be disappointed; but its desires will be accepted, its hunger and thirst after righteousness is a beatitude, and that heart "shall be filled."

There is one form of unbelief to which the young are liable, growing out of jealousy lest it be said that they are not independent in their opinions, but believe because they were so taught. Sometimes they are carried, by this desire to be independent, to foolish extremes, and make themselves absurd by refusing to believe any thing, or by a strained attempt to express their faith in an original manner. Now, it is too late for any of us to think of making any improvement upon the great truths of redemption, or of getting credit for originality with regard to them. Minds greater and far more competent than ours to weigh evidence, to detect sophistry and imposture, have rested every hope for eternity upon the truth of the Bible, while many have sealed that faith in the flames and on the rack of martyrdom. Nor can we invent any objection against the Bible which has not been invented and refuted long before we were born. It is commendable to know the grounds of our faith; we should inquire as to the reasonableness of the evidence for every thing which we believe; this the Bible itself exhorts us to do, charging us to give a reason to every man for the hope which is in us with meekness and fear, and commending certain Christians as being more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so. There could hardly be a stronger approbation of intelligent faith than is found in this passage,

in which it is not so much the faith which is commended, as the searching of the Scriptures to test it. So that no one should fear that religion has any wrong design upon his independence, for it will make him more intelligent and free from bigotry the more that he examines the Bible to know the grounds of his faith. Moreover, instead of being jealous with regard to the opinions of others in their influence over us, we should consider what a powerful defence we have against the suggestions of unbelief and the attacks of infidels, in the established convictions of that goodly fellowship of believers whose lives have been the best witness of the truth. We should love and seek "the footsteps of the flock," and be afraid to separate ourselves from the prints of those feet which followed the good Shepherd.

Now, whatever may be the subject with regard to which we labor, the surest source of relief is to come directly to Christ, and have our opinions settled with regard to him. The mind which is troubled by unbelief will find the best deliverance by first accepting the teachings of the Bible with respect to Christ; or if Christ himself be the object of doubt and difficulty, he has taught us, in one of his conversations with this same Thomas, that direct application to him is the only method of obtaining any object of faith. Christ had told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. "And whither I go ye know, and the way

ye know." They thought only of some earthly country or metropolis. "Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Would we come to God? Do we seek eternal life, and to this end wish to know the truth, and would we find that truth? Christ says, "I am the way." We must believe in him, and apply to him in his true character and offices, and first of all come as sinners to this Friend of sinners. "He that hath the Son hath life." It is a mistake to perplex our minds with any thing, or to seek relief from any thing before we come to Christ. Our first duty is to be reconciled to God as sinners to their Sovereign — not to understand mysteries nor resolve the difficulties of religion; but repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ first of all are required of us, and when we have complied with these requisitions, every thing will be plain; no longer shall we see men as trees walking; "he that is spiritual judgeth all things;" with a mind renewed by the Holy Spirit, we shall be led into all truth. Then let it be your chief desire to know Christ; conclude what to believe with regard to him; cease to speculate; approach him in prayer; be persuaded that the Saviour's personal interest in you at this moment in your trying state of mind is expressed in his words to Thomas:

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hand, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side ; and be not faithless, but believing.” The day will dawn and the daystar will arise in your heart the moment that you can respond with Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”

VII.

PETER ON THE WAVES.

AND PETER ANSWERED HIM, AND SAID, LORD, IF IT BE THOU, BID ME COME UNTO THEE ON THE WATER. AND HE SAID, COME. AND WHEN PETER WAS COME DOWN OUT OF THE SHIP, HE WALKED ON THE WATER, TO GO TO JESUS. BUT WHEN HE SAW THE WIND BOISTEROUS HE WAS AFRAID ; AND, BEGINNING TO SINK, HE CRIED, SAYING, LORD, SAVE ME. AND IMMEDIATELY JESUS STRETCHED FORTH HIS HAND, AND CAUGHT HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, O THOU OF LITTLE FAITH, WHEREFORE DIDST THOU DOUBT ?

CHRIST had gone up into a mountain to spend the night in prayer. The disciples whom he had sent before him to the other side of the lake were yet in the ship, and in the midst of a storm. Had he been there, they would have relied upon him to rebuke the winds and the sea ; but their faith in him was not yet such that they could avail themselves of the power of his name to cast out a devil nor to still a tempest. These disciples had just witnessed the miracle of feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus had remained behind to send the multitude away. They knew it ; and the remembrance

of that day's miracle, if mixed with faith in the power of Christ, would have made them feel safe in the perils of the sea. They had not yet learned the omnipresence of Christ as they afterward felt and preached it. But perhaps it was the case with them as it is with us — that the appearance of danger overcame the recollection of past deliverances ; and it is with us frequently as it was with them, that our great Intercessor is praying for us at times when we think that all is lost, as his midnight prayers in that mountain were obtaining safety for his disciples in the storm.

In the fourth watch of the night, or between the hours of three and six, Jesus came to them walking on the sea. The vision was indeed terrific. A human form standing erect upon the sea, and approaching a ship, is enough to make those in it suppose, as the disciples did, that it is a spirit, and to cry out for fear. Mercy and deliverance often come to us in ways which excite our fears ; we do not see that God is approaching us for any purpose but that of wrath in his dark dispensations. But in mercy as often as in wrath, "his way is in the sea, his path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known."

While the hearts of these men were yet agitated by the vision, the voice of Christ not having fully calmed their fear, and before time enough had elapsed to receive him into the ship, one of their number appealed to him for encouragement to meet him on

the water. The ardent and frequently inconsiderate, but most affectionate and zealous, Peter, bending over the vessel, strained his sight to penetrate the yet remaining darkness, and in the intervals of the dashing spray and waves to get further proof that it was Jesus; but the storm and the darkness prevented him from having the evidence of sight.

“Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” What could his motives and feelings be in this proposal? It is not likely that there was much, if any, deliberation preceding the request; but from a sudden, ardent impulse, reckless of danger, and full of love to Christ, with a seaman’s hardihood, he wished to stand at his Master’s side. He was willing to risk his life, and to make the unnatural experiment of walking on the water. He alone which spreadeth out the heavens, and maketh Arcturus, Orion, and the chambers of the south, treadeth on the waves of the sea. But perhaps he did not act presumptuously; for he first sought permission to come to Christ upon the water. The act of the Saviour in walking upon the waves struck that passion in Peter’s mind for daring deeds which was ever showing itself in his life. It was he who would make tabernacles, and dwell on the mount of transfiguration; it was he who would follow Christ, though all should forsake him; who drew his sword in a crowd to cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant; and

who, though outrun on his way to the sepulchre by another disciple, alone had courage to go in. Christ seems always to have thought much respecting Peter. Though John leaned on his bosom as the beloved disciple, Peter occupied a large place in his thoughts. He prayed for him in particular, knowing his constitutional tendency and the temptations which would assail him ; he reproved him faithfully with the wounds of a friend ; he took him to see his transfiguration, and to watch with him in Gethsemane ; he looked at him when the cock crew, and brought him, with a look, to contrition ; he challenged his love to him after he had risen, and bade him feed his lambs and his sheep ; he foretold by what manner of death he should glorify God ; he made him the chief apostle to Israel, to preach repentance to them and the remission of sins. Christ knew and loved his bold, affectionate heart ; and, indeed, who can fail to love him in the exhibition which we have before us of his ready and loving spirit ?

We may easily enter into the feelings of the disciples as they heard their brother calling to Christ with such a request. Why risk his life among the waves ? Christ will come into the ship. Why in such needless, reckless haste to reach him ? These cautious and proper feelings had no effect on Peter. Enterprise and danger were his element ; but chiefly his feelings toward Christ excited a desire to be with him before he

reached the ship. The spirit of the man in thus flinging himself into perils which appall most men can not but strike us with admiration, considering the feelings which prompted them.

Take this act of Peter as an act of faith. Viewed in this light, the feeling of its being rash and presumptuous is not reasonable. Why is it any more presumptuous to walk on the water at Christ's bidding than for one who had been a cripple from his birth to rise and walk at a word from Christ? If we have a clear warrant for any thing, it is not presumption nor rashness to undertake it. Peter said, Lord, bid me come to thee on the water. And he said, Come. That word warranted any risk; it was a ground of support in any exposure. Faith always seems presumption to an unbeliever. It seems to a worldling absurd when we tell him that religion can make him happier than his pleasures; to the avaricious man it is fanaticism when we say, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." But faith never seems more like presumption than to an anxious sinner. We tell him that he is to be pardoned and saved without any righteousness of his own — that he must give himself into the hands of God, to be accepted and justified, without any effort to make himself acceptable with God, pleading Christ as his only hope. It is impossible, by argument, to make the human mind feel that such faith is any thing but

presumption. It is not until the soul is forced to exercise it by such a sense of its lost and perishing state as makes every other refuge hopeless that the sinner casts himself, in a state of despair, upon God's mercy, and of necessity does that which, in a calm, deliberate state of mind, seemed unwarrantable presumption. If Peter had said, 'Lord, bid me that I command this whole lake to become dry land,' and Christ had said, 'Speak the word,' would it have been presumption to utter the command? Faith must have a warrant; but that warrant is not necessarily an express command or promise. The known character of Christ would have warranted Peter, if his need had been sufficient, to descend upon the waves and go to Christ without an express invitation. With a firm confidence in Christ, it would have been as impossible for him to sink as for the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to sink when Peter, by faith in Christ, lifted him up. It was the power of faith which finally made Peter go down out of the ship, for he waited for the command of Christ; and when the command was given, it was enough; he threw himself into the sea to meet Christ.

"And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to come to Jesus." There he found himself in a situation in which he never dreamed that he could be, and no doubt was unable to believe his own senses. The rest of the disciples

looked on, no doubt, with a mixture of astonishment and disapprobation, with cries of expostulation and entreaty, and perhaps meditating some means to rescue their suicidal brother. But onward he went to Christ. O, had he persevered, and by the power of faith had stood upon the waves at his Saviour's side, and calmly and triumphantly had returned with victorious faith to the ship, that act of faith would have been worthy of a place by the side of any thing recorded by the Apostle in the eleventh of Hebrews. What an opportunity Peter had to show the power of faith, walking steadfastly over billows, pressing his way successfully against a wind that heaved the sea from its foundations! With what pleasure should we have dwelt upon that incident in his life! What an example would he have left on record to stimulate faith under difficulties — to excite a bold reliance, in danger, upon the word of God! In a few moments of time, by once yielding to fear, Peter lost an opportunity of doing good to the whole world by his example, and of adding lustre to his Christian name.

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.” But the wind was his Saviour's servant, and subject to faith. What though it raged against him; did it not also at that moment rage against Christ? If Christ could save him from sinking, could he not as well save him while sinking? — as

he undoubtedly would have done if Peter's faith had not failed. Perhaps the waves and billows went up over his head ; they were higher when he stood among them than when he stood on his vessel and looked down upon them. Perhaps he lost sight of Christ, and felt, as he sunk on the receding wave, that he should never rise. But even if he had sunk beneath the waves, and had found himself at the bottom of the deep, faith, had it not failed him, would have made him confident that he should triumph ; and then what power would he have had in his preaching and in illustrating the meaning and the efficacy of faith ! This event, no doubt, had an important connection with his future conduct. It is doubtful whether he would have denied his Master if, from love to his name and confidence in his power, he had suffered himself to sink, trusting still to the power of Christ to raise him from the abyss. Could he have looked upon those mountain waves with an undaunted heart, he would perhaps, in some of the last terrible scenes of Christ's life, have been undismayed at the tumult of the people. Had he been able to breast that boisterous wind, standing still if he could not advance, or suffering it to blow him down or backward if he could not stand, still believing and holding on to that word of Christ, *Come*, he might have been willing to face the enemies of Christ, and to have been dragged to Pilate's bar with

his Saviour ; nor would that little maid have provoked him to curse and swear, denying that he knew Christ. Our Christian principles are strengthened only by being exercised ; and if the boisterous wind and the swelling billows had brought Peter's faith into full exercise, no one can tell what influence it might have had upon his character and conduct, and upon the world by his example and through its private effect on his character.

We are not to suppose that this scene was purely accidental — that it had no design. It is full of instruction ; it presents to our view Christ as a Friend in danger and tribulation, yet not for the mere purpose of support and comfort in tribulation. A far better object than support and consolation the Saviour seeks to effect by bidding us come to him in darkness and in great trials. He can do us no greater benefit than to increase our faith. If he will place us in the most trying scenes, under the most bitter afflictions, and carry us through them with no murmur upon our lips, no repining in our hearts, — if, while a starless night is around us, a heaving sea beneath our feet, and we are ready to sink under the weight of his waterspouts, he will fill us with greater love to him, unfailing confidence in him, and make us say that there is none upon earth that we desire beside him, — he will do us the greatest favor ; he will bestow the greatest endowment of spiritual strength upon us ; he will lay

the foundation of the greatest happiness here, and of praise, and honor, and glory at his appearing. One great end of all the dealings of God with us is to promote faith. Nothing honors God, nothing promotes true religion in us, like faith. Hence the dark and trying dispensations of Providence are, no doubt, intended for this purpose, and the darkness in them is the chosen means of producing the faith; for, could we see the reasons and the object, there would be small room for faith in our trials. Perhaps Christ never had a greater design of love and friendship with regard to Peter than when he gave him that wonderful opportunity to show his faith. Therefore, in contemplating Christ as a Friend, let us not think of him merely as wiping our tears; let us believe that when he comes in clouds, and places us among billows, and rolls the very seas over our heads, he is seeking to do for us the greatest and best thing; and that is, to increase our faith. He destroys our hopes, he covers our faces with sackcloth, he ploughs upon our backs and makes long his furrows, he builds against us, and encloses our way with hewn stone, till human strength seems ready to sink. If at such times we stay ourselves upon his promise, love him still, justify him, make him our all in all, the result will prove that never, except as a sacrifice for our sins, did he have greater love to us, nor was he ever more our Friend.

Perhaps we are disposed to say, ‘Had I been Peter,

I would have endured that trial of faith better than he. Christ bidding me come, the wind and the waves should have forced me down to the very bars of death ; nor would I have lost that opportunity to gain a triumph of faith.'

And what has been your conduct, courageous soul, under circumstances sent upon you for the very same purpose with that for which Christ came to that vessel in which he had "constrained his disciples" to embark, and in trials of faith ordered for the same wise purpose for which Christ bade Peter to come to him on the sea ? You have been sick, it may be, at a time most inconvenient and trying, and subjected thereby to great disadvantage ; death may have spoiled you of precious treasures ; a reverse of fortune may have befallen you ; great injustice, provocations, violent appetites or passions may have assailed you ; dark hours of depression and melancholy, disappointments that imbittered life, may have been your portion. Amid these clouds and storms, these winds and waves, the voice of Christ has nevertheless spoken to your heart by his Word and Spirit, saying, Come. How have you trod the unquiet sea ? Out of the depths how have you cried unto God ? As wave after wave has threatened to destroy you, have you been able to say, with David, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts ; all thy waves and thy billows have gone over me ; yet the Lord will command his

loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me"? One of the greatest achievements in the world is, to behave well in trouble. Nothing honors God more than firm confidence in him in times of adversity. This is that trial of faith much more precious than of gold that perisheth, which will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. We seldom know when we are going into circumstances which will call for a peculiar exercise of faith. Peter began to sink before he expected it. Temptations spring upon us out of ambush; hidden occurrences find us off our guard; or the circumstances of our trials are so directly from the agency of others that we frequently do not think of God in them. Yet Christ is using them for our spiritual benefit, and we should think of him, more than of them. Peter had his eye on the billows, and not on Christ; he could not believe that his Saviour rolled those billows against him — the Saviour who had said to him, 'Come.' He felt that Christ could not have known what mighty billows they were, or he never would have encouraged him to walk amongst them. So with us in heavy trials. It seems to us that God has forgotten to be gracious — that in anger he has shut up his tender mercies. We can point to certain aggravations in our trials which are uncommon and peculiar, as though God had not ordained every one of them, and had not a special design in

each feature of our trouble, and in mixing each and every ingredient in our cup. When the trouble has passed by, we can see how we should have felt and acted while it continued ; but, like Peter, we have lost an opportunity of strengthening many a Christian principle. It is wise to look upon every thing which happens to us here as a part of God's plan with us, having a design. Instead of this, we are prone to live as though this were a world of chance and accidents, afflictions springing out of the dust, and God without any plan or purpose in the daily events of our life. But consider that this short life is with each of us a probationary state with reference to endless existence. Every event, then, must be of importance, and therefore is a part of God's purposes concerning us ; for these events are forming our characters for eternity ; and can it be of slight importance, then, what happens to us day by day ? When a great sculptor is making a face which is to go down to posterity, every stroke has a meaning ; nothing is accidental ; all tends to one great end. So God is forming you for immortality. Every event of every day is intended for some effect upon your immortal character and condition. If we could only keep this in view, and remember that discipline is the great end and object of this life, our trials and troubles would be endured with more patience ; we should be still "educing good" out of every "seeming evil ;" we should glory

in tribulations. The disciples, safe in their ship, as they looked on Peter, perhaps thought that, had they begun like him to walk on the water to Christ, they would have been consistent, and would have carried out their purpose. So we think, when we look upon the troubles of others ; we know how to advise them ; we know how they ought to feel ; we repeat the promises to them ; we see what opportunities they have to glorify God in the day of their visitation and make valuable improvement of their afflictions ; and if we would be as skillful in our trials as we are in directing them, we should all of us profit more under the rod of the Almighty. The example of Peter illustrates the opportunity which troubles afford us of receiving and doing great good. The hand of a friend is in them. Christ is among the billows, thinking more of us and of our conduct than we do of those winds which we forget are held in his fist, and of those waters which are in the hollow of his hand. By them he is affording us occasions for great spiritual heroism, and of usefulness and divine approbation.

Christ, in saving Peter, added a gentle rebuke — “ O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ? ” He seems to say to him, ‘ Had you but persevered a little, you would have triumphed.’ Christ did not sympathize with him at the violence of the wind, nor excuse him on account of the swelling waves. He tells him that he was of little faith, implying that a

greater degree of faith would have been a match for all the perils of the sea.

What would Peter now give, had he known, the night when he was going down out of that boat to walk on the water, that the history of that act was to be written in God's book, to be translated into every tongue, and to make a distinct and forcible impression upon every soul of Adam's race who should read it? How would he have acted had he known that his denial of Christ was to be written with the point of a diamond in the hearts of men, and graven in their memories for eternity? What would he not give if he could now pass through those several scenes again? We may ask the same question respecting Adam, and Moses, and David, and Solomon. As a contrast to these, what must be the feelings of Abraham as he thinks of his faith in offering Isaac, and of the influence of his example upon the world! Who can express the gladness of the virtuous Joseph, of the patient, suffering Jeremiah, of the widow that cast her two mites into the treasury of God, of the woman that was a sinner making bold to anoint her Saviour's feet, and of the constancy and love of that beloved disciple, John? Can you express, can all heaven tell, can eternity measure the joy of their hearts that they had temptations and tribulations; that God counted them worthy to be thus tried; and that they were enabled here on earth to do as they did, and lay up

such themes for everlasting joy as their conduct here supplies ?

And do you know, immortal man, that you are now occupying the place in this world in which those men once stood ; that you are doing things which are going upon a record perhaps to be concealed from the world for the present, but, however that may be, to be disclosed hereafter ; to be known by countless spirits, and more than all this, to be perpetually subjects of your meditation ? You are glad that you are not Peter to remember that you denied Christ, or that you failed of an act of faith which would have made you eminently useful and happy forever. But you may be a Peter in the weakness of your faith, if in no other respect. You are surrounded, perhaps, to-day with opportunities whose result may be, in like manner, important to you as those instances of trial were to him. You would be glad to have Abraham's consciousness, and Stephen's joy, and Paul's crown. Who knows but you may ? Who can tell that you are not now situated so that, by faith proportioned to your circumstances, you may please God like them ? Are you in trouble ? The prophets, apostles, and martyrs did not know in their troubles what the influence of them would be, and, at the time, they saw as little of God's design in their sufferings as you do in your present trials ; but they endured, and now inherit the promises.

To look at the subject in another view : Perhaps you are now under special religious impressions. God may have come very near to you by his Spirit ; and you may now have special opportunities of exercising faith — opportunities which may have as lasting an influence on your character and happiness as that which you read of in the Bible had upon ancient saints. For example : It may be that the question is now distinctly set before your mind, whether you will begin to live for God ; you have an opportunity at the present time to take a decided step in favor of religion ; the world and the flesh dissuade you ; conscience, your hopes, your fears, and the Spirit of God constrain you ; it may be that you will see through eternity that this present time had as great an influence upon your character and history, and upon your feelings, and upon your influence forever, as critical seasons in the lives of men recorded in the Bible now appear to have had on them. The command may now be laid before you to make a sacrifice of your feelings or of your sins, which sacrifice will cost you as much as it did Abraham to offer up Isaac. Perhaps you are in some such circumstances as Lot was when God called him and his family to flee from Sodom ; and your history may correspond with that of Lot, or of her who looked back and became a pillar of salt. How little she thought that her look backward would be mentioned here to-day, and be known throughout the wide world !

But in the histories of eternity we may read your name associated with precisely such conduct. Perhaps you are now like Zaccheus, when he climbed the tree to see Christ; like him who, for the pieces of silver, betrayed his Lord. You can not tell of what infinite importance your present circumstances may prove to have been. So common a thing as listening to a sermon, and the feelings and conduct which ensue from it, may, in connection with previous probation, be the appointed event of trial in which you may give character to your whole being, and that hour be the time which will always be prominent in your thoughts. Suppose, for example, that some young man here to-day should be prevailed upon to be a Christian, and should, in consequence, be a herald of the cross, and turn many to righteousness; would not the history of this hour ever be to him and to others as interesting as the history of the jailer's conversion, or even as that of Saul of Tarsus, was to him? Events like that supposed have frequently occurred, and you may now be under influences which will become to you the sources of endless thoughtfulness, of joy or pain.

Perhaps some of you, who have passed the season of youth, may at the present time be in that period of your spiritual history on which your memories will be fixed millions of ages from this day, as the all-important season of your being. When a man reduces a large map to a miniature map of a few inches, every

line, every word, every dot which he makes in that small engraving is the subject of great deliberation. When God makes a few inches of time a probation for eternity, every call of conscience and of the Spirit, every Sabbath, every appeal from the pulpit, every opportunity to repent and believe the gospel, — must it not be of vast importance? I am preaching to you from a text and upon a subject which comport well with this very dark day.* The sun is far above the horizon, but these lights by the pulpit alone disclose your faces to me. It may be that one of you was sent here that in this storm and darkness which are adding force to the text and subject, you might hear the voice of Christ addressed to your faith, saying, "Come." This Sabbath may be of more consequence to you, the feelings and the decisions of to-day may be more important, than the ages of eternity will fully unfold.

When we are specially interested about our souls, and the duty which lies plainly before us is to go to Christ, and we know that we can not save ourselves; that our righteousness is only our condemnation, that Christ died in our stead, that faith in him will be imputed to us for righteousness, and that we have nothing to do, and can do nothing but go to the Saviour and give our perishing souls into his hands; we may well consider that Peter's trial is repeated in us.

* November 13, 1853.

And in what respects? Because we are full of doubts and fears; we feel guilty; we are afraid of such a risk as renouncing our present hold on our own efforts, and venturing on Christ. We crave some assurance beforehand that Christ has accepted us before we go to him; we shrink from casting ourselves at his feet, lest the despairing state of mind in which we do it will not be followed by peace and hope. In a word, we seek to have hope before we exercise faith. We see that we must believe, trust, venture, despair, before we can truly submit ourselves to Christ, and so, like Peter in the ship, we strain our sight in the darkness and storm which is about us, and say, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." The Saviour says, "Come." What will you do? Your conduct now, more than that of Peter, involves the salvation of the soul. Yet his situation is a light to guide you. Will you go down upon the waves and go to Jesus, throw yourself in faith, — which you may call presumption, for it will seem to you presumption, — throw yourself in faith upon this dark and stormy water, and say, "If I perish, I perish"? The very thing which Peter failed to do, you may perform. Say, 'Lord, I will come. All thy waves and thy billows go over me. But to whom shall I go? Perish I must, without Christ; and if I perish, I will perish going to Christ.' Thus you will trust in his sufferings and death, pleading his blood for your pardon, and renoun-

cing all dependence and hopes, but that Christ died for you. Go, then, trembling soul ; the Saviour stands upon the dark billows and bids you come. He says to you beforehand, "O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?" We the disciples are looking upon you from the ship ; witnesses from heaven may be watching the result ; the tempter will frustrate your rising purpose if he can ; but now is your time ; you may not have another. "Believe, and thou shalt be saved."

Happily, these Scripture characters impress different minds in different ways, and suggest varied instruction. I take pleasure in giving the following truthful, as well as beautiful, piece from "Songs of Christian Chivalry. London, 1848."

Fear to ask, "If it be thou,
 Bid me come to thee,"
 Though thou think'st at Jesus' word
 Thou could'st walk the sea.
 Haste is mingling with such faith,
 And betrays it weak.
 Rather be it thine to wait
 • Till thy Lord shall speak.

He, or e'er thy thought be said,
 Well thy glowing heart hath read.
 If he bid thee walk the wave,
 Be thou sure that he will save.
 But, thy frailty all forgot,
 Such commandment tempt thou not,
 Lest thou learn in shame, at length,
 Conscious weakness is our strength.

Hast thou faith and could'st thou joy
Perils to abide ?
Yet bethink thee how a saint
His dear Lord denied !
“ Yea, though all offended be,
I will not,” he said ;
But for those presumptuous words
Bitter tears were shed !

Taught from thence with lowly mind
Keep the place his love assigned ;
Answering but, “ Thy will be done,”
At his bidding thou shalt run,
Gathering strength in self-control,
Patiently possess thy soul,
Storing up each earnest thought
For a time with trial fraught.

VIII.

NATHANAEL.



JESUS SAW NATHANAEL COMING TO HIM, AND SAITH OF HIM, BEHOLD AN ISRAELITE INDEED, IN WHOM IS NO GUILDE.

OUR Saviour and Friend can appreciate something besides our guilt and misery ; he rejoices in the moral and Christian excellence of his followers. The reproachful name of publicans and sinners did not attach to all whom he loved ; though all who truly loved him loved him the more for seeking and saving that which was lost. Doubtless there were more than are recorded who excited pleasure in him through approbation of their characters. John the Baptist, Nathanael, and the beloved disciple, Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, show that he was not merely a philanthropist, nor an official Redeemer ; that he appreciated goodness, and loved it in those who, while they needed as much as others to be justified by his grace, commended themselves to his affections

by their excellent qualities, and by that means made him their personal friend.

What could remain to be desired by one of whom Jesus Christ should say, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile"?

We may suppose that Christ in these words expressed the idea of great moral excellence. Though completeness of character would require other things besides that which is here ascribed to Nathanael, and which he may have possessed, yet the characteristic here mentioned is, perhaps more than any thing else, the basis of moral character, and is essential to the approbation and love of Christ.

Truth may be said to be the foundation of the moral universe; for without it there can be no correct knowledge of God, no just conceptions of our duty and of right and wrong, no confidence between man and his Maker, nor among men. As regularity is essential in the movements of those heavenly bodies whose orbits intersect, so truth is indispensable in the relations of moral beings. God must insist on truth as of the first importance; all his communications to us will enforce it; all that we know of his character and acts will show his love of it, and his abhorrence of falsehood and deceit. If among men falsehood, so far as it prevails, makes intercourse impossible by deranging affairs,—if to forge a name, to transmit

false information, to deceive in selling, are crimes which excite feelings like the instinctive impulses of self-defence against personal violence, — much more disastrous must falsehood be in things affecting our moral and spiritual concerns.

Guile is the great characteristic of the evil which is in us. This is impressively taught in that passage where the inspired writer characterizes the human heart by saying, "The heart is deceitful above all things." David teaches this when he tells us that the man "to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity," is the same as he "in whose spirit there is no guile." In that psalm of penitence wrung from David by his disastrous fall and his recovery by God's free Spirit, written at a time when his experience led him to appreciate fully the nature of goodness, he says, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts." These few words, uttered at such a moment from the inmost depths of a soul where God had made his own character and will to be felt in no ordinary degree, show us the infinite value which the heart-searching God places upon truth. David, the king, proposed to teach the young, whom he loved greatly, (and Solomon, also, in this way showed true wisdom,) one great secret of piety and happiness: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy

tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” Peter repeats the same thing in almost the same words: “For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.” John mentions this as a characteristic of the “hundred and forty and four thousand:” “And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God.” A name given by the Saviour to the Holy Spirit is, “the Spirit of Truth.” It completes all which we need to say on this point when we remember that the character of the spotless Lamb of God is thus expressed: “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

There are no limits to the pervading nature of guile in human character where it has power; it goes into all our feelings; it destroys that self-respect which makes us free and happy with others; we are embarrassed by it in our intercourse with God. Sincerity makes us transparent in our feelings. Truthfulness, like vitalizing blood, affects the unconscious complexion of a man's acts, his unstudied, spontaneous feelings, his impulses, as well as his principles. A man in whom is no guile is not necessarily so plain as to be discourteous, nor need he be blunt, nor abrupt, nor reserved; he will be honest, he will be faithful, he will naturally be free from jealousy and suspicion, charitable in his feelings and judgment, simple in his

manners ; and no man will be more likely than he to be pure in heart.

Truthfulness in a young child — of which we not unfrequently have beautiful examples — illustrates its nature and influence in a happy manner. In a number of children, if there be one from whom you are sure of receiving a true statement, even when it involves himself, he lays for himself in your mind a lasting foundation for respect and confidence. His simple, ingenuous narrative moves you to tears by its mere artless truthfulness ; you remember it as often as you think of him all your life long, and nothing is a surer passport to esteem and trust. However far a child may, through thoughtlessness or the strength of passion, go astray, if he is truthful, there is hope of him ; if he is deceitful and slippery, there is no foundation on which to build a good character. By judicious, never-ceasing efforts, deceitfulness may be cured ; and it must be cured, or the result will be at least a worthless character, and not only injury to the individual, but no one can tell how extensively to the world.

Our general approbation and love of truthfulness is seen in this — that when our wishes do not make us willing to be deceived, we respect and love one whose mind takes and transmits just and true impressions ; who does not color, nor exaggerate, nor conceal, nor embellish the truth. There is a feeling of

protection and safety when we repose upon the statements of such persons, who, amidst temptations to please, or flatter, or soothe, or blind us, from motives deemed justifiable, impress us with their truthfulness, foregoing the momentary pleasure of exciting wonder or gratifying the known wishes of the listener, and seeming to love truth for its own sake. It is a good sign if the heartless forms of mere ceremonious intercourse in society, its apologies, its expressions of gladness or sorrow, the numerous things which are said as matters of course, are distasteful to us. It also shows a deep feeling of truthfulness to withhold expressions of wonder and surprise when nothing of the kind is felt; for these are a form of deceit in which it is true no harm is intended, but, on the contrary, they have the appearance of being benevolent; yet, proceeding really from a want of moral courage, they hurt the moral sense, and secretly prevent others from respecting and confiding in us as truthful.

It is well said that "there are intellectual requisites for truth which are as much caused by truth as causing it. Much of exaggeration is owing to an impatient and easily moved temperament, which longs to convey its own vivid impressions to other minds, and seeks by amplifying, to gain the full measure of their sympathy. But a true man does not think what his hearers are feeling, but what he is saying."

Guile is seen in "making speech vary according to

the person spoken to ;” in “pretending to agree with the world when we do not ;” in “not acting agreeably to our deliberate and well-advised opinion, because some mischief may be made of it by those whose judgment in the case we do not respect ;” in “maintaining a wrong course for the sake of consistency ;” in “encouraging the show of intimacy with those with whom we never can be intimate. These practices have elements of charity and prudence, as well as fear and meanness, in them. Let those parts which correspond to fear and meanness be put aside. Herein lies one of the great trials of a man — that his sincerity should have kindness in it, and his kindness truth.” One who has an exaggerated manner of speaking in common things can not be without guile in things of more importance. One who is not strictly observant with regard to promises, and to all the lesser engagements which he makes in ordinary affairs, will not be free from this deadly evil. We must watch ourselves in these and such like things if we would be Israelites indeed.

Nathanael, in being without guile, was not for that reason a soft, effeminate character ; for the first thing which is said of him shows that he was not a credulous man. His ready answer to the surprising and awakening information that the Messiah had come was, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ?” Neither had he any obstinate prejudice, for the simple

good sense of Philip satisfied him. Christ knew what Nathanael had said, for he knew all things ; yet he did not upbraid him with it, but met him with an unqualified commendation.

He must have been a man whom no party nor love of party could seduce from the strictest fairness and truthfulness. He could not be used, he was one of the last men to be thought of, to plan and carry out certain stratagems. He would have marred the plots in the councils of unfair men. Yet he could by no means have been weak ; for then there would have been no virtue in his guileless character to have excited commendation. There is a simplicity which is mere simpleness ; and this is far from being the object of commendation in the text. Good sense must judge how far truth and honesty require us to proceed in giving information to those with whom we deal. There is a justice due to ourselves, according to the laws of society, which we can not properly disregard, and the man is weak who does not consider it. A sound mercantile conscience is an honorable and enviable thing — a conscience which on the one hand is not morbid, knows where justice requires us to stop, is able to resist the strongest feelings of commiseration at proper times, and will not suffer unjustifiable loss in going beyond the requirements of fair and honorable trade — a conscience which is not ready to surrender every thing on demand, but.

taught by knowledge and experience, feels impelled to ask, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" yet, on the other hand, a conscience which shrinks from duplicity, and in a word remonstrates, unless it is clear that in the transaction there is no guile. Trade is eminently fitted to make such a conscience, affording, as it does every hour, opportunity for practice. No rules were ever given to meet even a small part of the cases which may arise. The Saviour's commendation of Nathanael, remembered and earnestly coveted, will be sufficient to make us upright and fair, while selfishness will generally remain in a sufficient degree to keep us from being righteous overmuch.

It may be said with truth that there is hardly one thing in which religion suffers more at the hands of those who are members of churches than when they are known to be deceitful in business. If they are detected in fraudulent transactions, the cause of truth suffers beyond measure, the hands of the good are weakened, and bad men are encouraged in their sneers. There are those of whom the Bible says, "Their throat is an open sepulchre;" for on coming near them you are sure to be reminded of the decayed reputation of professed Christians. Those receptacles of the dead yawn greedily to receive each new defaulter from the church. All this is good testimony that there is such a thing as true religion, and that it is chiefly looked for in certain directions; but yet we can dispense with

counterfeit money, notwithstanding it is a true index of a sound currency. A greater cause for sorrow, perhaps, to the friends of truth, is when a Christian church fails to vindicate itself before the community by a pronounced abhorrence of deceit or fraud in those who are known to be deserving of church discipline.

We are furnished by this subject with instruction as to some of the ways in which our influence as Christians may be greatly useful. One who is known to have resisted a temptation to overreach or defraud, and has acted uprightly from force of principle, is taken by many as an exponent of religion. The thought of him comes to their minds when listening to appeals addressed to their consciences and hearts; whereas the knowledge of one who makes professions of piety, or is simply known as a church member, and is unfair, will weaken the sense of religious obligations in those who say that they prefer morality without religion to religion without morality—a kind of religion, indeed, which has no existence except in name.

A low, unworthy state of feeling and conduct in a Christian is owing as often as to any other cause to this—that he practices guile in his relations to God. The world, hard and unjust, oftentimes, in its judgment of Christians, is frequently right when it asks concerning some who profess to be Christians, “What

do ye more than others?" There is nothing in the principles which seem to rule their feelings and conduct, nothing in the spirit which they breathe, different from the world around them. We can not sincerely believe that which we profess respecting redemption and retributions, we can not believe in such a Saviour as we profess to follow, nor love him as such a Saviour is loved by all who are faithful to him, and not be different from those who have no such faith. Where is the Christian sobriety, the cheerful trust, the ardent love, the ready zeal, which are the natural effect of believing in and loving such a Saviour? There is reason to fear that we sometimes practice guile in our very intercourse with Christ. What must he think of us, if, while acknowledging the debt of love and gratitude arising from his death, we are mere formalists? No one ever deceived him; he reads our hearts; he has a perfect judgment, a fixed opinion, of every one of us. Professions of love, zealous attachments to the forms of religion, to the doctrines of the gospel, are of themselves useless to him. While I was standing at the dying bed of one whom many of you so highly respected and revered among other things for his consistent Christian character and his great sincerity,* he sent messages in his delirium to some of his friends, and this was one of them: "Tell — that there is no bartering with God." He had for-

* Rev. B. B. Wisner, D. D.

merly had reason to be dissatisfied with the individual whom he here named, as wanting in that transparency of motives in his Christian policy which marked his own character, though his friend was eminently a useful man. The message was never delivered, but it sunk deep into the hearts of those that heard it. "There is no bartering with God." We can each interpret for himself this imperfect utterance from a dying bed.

Perhaps it was because the kind and forbearing nature of the new dispensation would afford great room for deceit in very many cases, that early in that dispensation, one of the most terrible judgments of God fell on two professors of religion, Ananias and Sapphira. It is not presuming to suppose that God, who, while he is the God of salvation, is a jealous God, and will not be mocked, saw fit by this judgment to warn men that the soothing and conciliating spirit of the gospel would make no compromise with insincerity; that God sets no value on gifts nor professions of obedience, nor does he seek our names or influence as though he needed any thing, and that if we deal with him, we must remember that God is not mocked, "neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." This, no doubt, was the lesson taught the early church by the

death of Ananias and Sapphira, for we are told that "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." We must not secretly feel that the gospel has removed the law as our rule of duty, nor lowered its standard; nor that holiness and sin are in any wise changed since that law was promulgated with lightnings and thunders, and enforced in the times of God's immediate presence with men as their King by such fearful judgments. But on the contrary, we ought to feel that as the spirituality of the law is greatly illustrated by Christ, and as mercy has become the prominent feature of the divine administration under the gospel, a higher degree of conformity to God, a more scrupulous regard for inward truth and purity, is, if possible, expected of those who live under such a dispensation. This argument is pressed in a forcible manner in the Epistle to the Hebrews. More than once we are admonished in the New Testament that more will be required of us, and less excuse will be made for us, than if we lived before the coming of Christ. There was "a sort of untruthful policy current in the early times even among those who are recorded as the righteous and the believing, and which seems to have been not only tolerated among men, but in those days of the world's yet rudimental morality to have been permitted by God — the days of ignorance which God winked at, and when concessions were made of a less strict and elevated morality,

even to his own people, because of the hardness of their hearts.”* — But now the darkness is past, and the true light shines. While the Old Testament furnishes us with examples of the highest spirituality, and our language in confessions of sin and desires after holiness is chiefly drawn from the Psalms of David, it is also true that it is the nature of the gospel to furnish still higher motives to the strictest conformity to God, while by its redeeming blood and witnessing spirit, and the light which is poured upon truth and duty through the accumulated experience and examples of believers, we are made inexcusable if we fail to serve God with reverence and godly fear, or if we do not live and act feeling that “our God is a consuming fire,” and that sin is fuel wherever found.

Truth among men, illustrated and enforced by the example of those who, as Christians, should be patterns of it in business, in politics, in writing and speaking, in fashionable life, in the management of children, in their intercourse with God, is at present our great need. Its prevalence would prevent widespread disasters in our mercantile affairs ; it would be a leaven in Christian character which would affect society in every part ; many a controversy would be prevented, many an excitement which sweeps through the land would be arrested, many a project which embroils individuals and sections of the coun

* Dr. Chalmers.

try against each other would never see the light. As the number of those Israelites increase in whom is no guile, we shall see pure religion prosper, and there will be "peace upon Israel."

It is interesting to see, as we do, from this interview between Christ and Nathanael, that no one can be secretly good and not be seen and approved by Christ. Nathanael had not come to the knowledge of the Messiah when Christ first loved him. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." We should all be willing to know what he was doing under that fig tree. It is hardly to be supposed that it was some common act of prayer. Some secret deed of piety, of which Christ would not inform Philip, the Saviour had witnessed there — some special sorrow and repentance, some covenanting with God, some forgiving interview with an enemy, or secret protestation before God of forgiveness, some season of devotion in the midst of an overwhelming trial, some special thanksgiving; at all events, a spiritual experience with which the fig tree that served him in his retirement was always remembered by him, as a stone or pillar in his history.

Christ seemed to take pleasure in the thought of all which Nathanael was to enjoy in knowing him as the Mediator. We notice his kindness in responding as he did to the faith of Nathanael, who exclaimed at the proof which he had received of Christ's omniscience,

“ Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” Christ here connects Jacob and Jacob’s experience with Nathanael, in the mind of Nathanael. Jacob’s pile of stones proved to be the foot of a ladder which maintained communication between heaven and earth. Nathanael’s fig tree would prove to be like the foot of a ladder, or the beginning of events, by which as great things as Jacob saw should be revealed to him. For Christ was to bring heaven and earth into nearer fellowship and communion; Nathanael was to know and love Christ, by whom he would come to the Father, and the Father would draw nearer to him. Could we know the history of Nathanael as a Christian disciple, we should, no doubt, see a man whom Christ greatly loved, and who loved Christ; an Enoch, who walked with God. He disappears, however, among those who are hereafter to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

If we will put away from us all guile in our intercourse with Christ, if we will be strictly observant of our word which we have given him, and be in secret that which we profess at the table of Christ to be,

then he to whom one said, "Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee," whose favor is life, whose loving kindness is better than life, will be our Friend. The beloved disciple tells us how we are to secure and maintain true friendship with God: "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another;" that is, God and we; then, and not unless we are thus sincere, then, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Of all the instances of simplicity in the communication of truth, a simplicity which the Holy Ghost alone teaches, perhaps we rarely find an instance which surpasses one which occurs in this same beloved disciple: "This then is the message which we have heard from him," — at which words we expect some great disclosure, — "that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." So simple, so obvious, do these words seem, we are tempted to pass them by. Apply them, however, to the exercises of your deceitful heart for one day, examine your Christian consistency by them, your fairness, your truthfulness, and you will see the practical value of the words, as well as the admonitory, and to the doubting and desponding, and to the perplexed and despairing soul, the cheering and consoling nature of that "message." In proportion as we walk in the light, we are sincere, and so have fellowship with God and with Christ, and we are taught by the Saviour's words to Nathanael that we shall then

see continually greater things in the disclosures of divine wisdom and goodness to our experience. May the Spirit help our infirmity. "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." Whatever qualities in some whom Christ loved are unattainable by us, or whatever circumstances favored them in obtaining blessings from him which we can not enjoy, there is one commendation from which we surely may not feel necessarily debarred, one which if we possess, we shall "never fall, but so an entrance will be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." That commendation, bestowed upon Nathanael, is a surer passport to general respect and influence than any thing else, because it is something which all can appreciate, and to which every man is willing to do homage. Its chief value is in this — that it prepares us for fellowship with God on earth, for great advances in every form of moral excellence, for peace and comfort in life and death, and through grace for acceptance with Him who is to judge the secrets of men's hearts for their last rewards. Amongst the many occasions which others have had for love and praise from Christ, we would desire not the least, but rather first of all, that Christ might say of each of us, — "in whom is no guile."

IX.

THE FRIEND OF SEAMEN.

AND JESUS, WALKING BY THE SEA OF GALILEE, SAW TWO BRETHREN, SIMON, CALLED PETER, AND ANDREW, HIS BROTHER, CASTING A NET INTO THE SEA ; FOR THEY WERE FISHERS.

AND HE SAITH UNTO THEM, FOLLOW ME ; AND THEY STRAIGHTWAY LEFT THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM.

AND GOING ON FROM THENCE, HE SAW OTHER TWO BRETHREN, JAMES, THE SON OF ZEBEDEE, AND JOHN, HIS BROTHER, IN A SHIP WITH ZEBEDEE, THEIR FATHER, MENDING THEIR NETS ; AND HE CALLED THEM.

AND THEY IMMEDIATELY LEFT THE SHIP AND THEIR FATHER, AND FOLLOWED HIM.

THERE is reason to think, as many do, that the Saviour of the world is in a special manner the Friend of seamen. He showed an interest when on earth in classes ; for example, in the afflicted, in great sinners, and in children. Among the reasons which lead us to think that he may be called the Friend of seamen is, Their opportunities and qualifications for promoting religion in the earth are great, and, Christ chose four out of twelve of his first Apostles from the sea. His selection of a third part of his twelve disciples from one

class suggests the belief that he was interested in men of that calling ; and if so, the probable reasons for that interest apply as well to seamen at the present day as to the fishermen of Galilee. We will not press this point till we consider if there be good reasons to sustain it.

Suppose that Christ had selected four of his twelve Disciples and Apostles from the medical profession, or that four of them had been Jewish priests, or that four had been lawyers ; could we have resisted the impression that there were reasons which led him to look with peculiar interest on those classes as affording special qualifications for usefulness in the early service of his religion ?

We can not, therefore, believe that the noticeable proportion of his first twelve Apostles, who were taken from among the fishermen of Galilee, was accidental. It seems to show a special interest in that class of men ; it may be from the circumstance that in belonging to that class they had special qualifications for usefulness as his first disciples.

When we look at the influences which affect the progress of the Christian religion in the earth, and see what a distinguished part the seafaring class have borne, and still bear, in spreading or hindering the truth, — when we consider how interesting in themselves as a class seamen always have been, and always will be, to those who appreciate their character and

the influences which surround them, — we hazard little in saying that the interest manifested by the Saviour in the fishermen of Galilee affords ground to think that the mariner, in all subsequent time, is, for the same obvious reasons, a special object of his regard.

Had Christ laid the scene of his earthly labors along the shores of the Mediterranean, it is not impossible that the motives which led him to select those four inland seamen as Apostles would have led him to seek and find an Andrew and Peter, a James and John, among the sea-going class in the ports of foreign commerce. But the kingdom of heaven, which is like a grain of mustard seed, and like leaven which is hid, began in a more humble and private manner, in accordance with its nature as contrasted with the pride and pomp of men. Bethlehem Ephratah, so little among the thousands of Judah, Nazareth, its name contemptuously proverbial, Galilee, with its large infusion of Gentiles, and its broad, corrupted dialect, were the first witnesses of that stone which was cut out of the mountains without hands, and is to fill the earth. Accordingly He who was to have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, seems to have made an inland water the emblem of his triumph and dominion over the undiscovered oceans; his native lake was the Bethlehem of the seas, and the fishermen of Galilee the

first fruits of a most interesting and useful class of men, to whom he purposed to show great love and kindness by employing them in the ages to come as fishers of men. If in the following discourse too much is taken for granted, or asserted, with regard to the interest which Christ feels in seamen, — if a strong love for them, and a deep interest in their calling, in their exposures, in their Christian character and usefulness, seem to exaggerate the feelings of Christ toward them, — let it be considered, if the love and interest of Christians with regard to them for the reasons assigned be so great, whether it be not probable that he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God ; and if we, being evil, feel thus, how much more does He who can perfectly appreciate the reasons for these feelings.

The Sea or Lake of Galilee has two other names in Scripture ; viz., the Sea of Tiberias, and the Lake of Gennesareth, because Tiberias and Gennesareth were important towns on its south-western and western borders, while it lay in that part of Palestine called Galilee. It is about thirteen miles in length, and five or six wide. Secluded in its situation, and surrounded by elevated and once fruitful slopes, it affords one of the most striking prospects in the Holy Land. The mountains on the east come close to its shore : and these, with the western hills, of which Tabor is a summit, defend it from long-continued storms, while,

like all inland waters, it is subject to sudden and violent winds. The Jordan flows through it from north to south ; and when the south-east wind swept up the lake and met the current of the river, we can easily conceive of what the sacred historian tells us respecting its boisterous condition when it wrought and was tempestuous. This was the sea which the Saviour crossed repeatedly in the labors of his ministry. On these stormy billows he walked in the fourth watch of a tempestuous night. Here he slept in the hinder part of a ship while the disciples were in jeopardy, till he arose and calmed the tempest with a word. Here he permitted Peter to descend from the vessel and come to him on the waves ; and over its bosom he retreated from the multitudes, that in the solitude of its adjacent wilds he might enjoy seasons of solitary prayer. It served him once as a place from which he preached salvation to the thronging multitudes on shore, and then rewarded those who had lent him their boat for a pulpit by giving them a miraculous draught of fishes.

The history of one of these four men who were chosen from that lake side by Christ is a prominent part of the history of the Christian religion. He who was casting his net in his humble occupation of a fisherman little thought that he was to be called by idolatrous millions *Saint Peter* ; that the most magnificent temple in the world was to be Saint Peter's

Church ; that he was to be set up in it in the shape of a bronze image of the heathen Jupiter, and that kings and nobles, rich and poor, would make pilgrimages from distant parts of Europe and from Asia to kiss his foot. Though Christ foreknew all this, still he called him to be an Apostle ; for by him in many ways the plan of salvation, as the power and wisdom of God, was strikingly illustrated. We also see in his history the kindness of Christ in calling a man to be an Apostle who, he foresaw, would deny him. If the goodness of God should be stayed in its beginnings toward us by the foresight of our unworthiness, who could be saved ? But the love of God is as rich and free toward them that are called according to his purpose as though they were to be perfect men. This gives us an affecting view of divine goodness, which overflows toward us in some parts of our lives, notwithstanding it is then foreseen how unworthy of such goodness our future conduct will show us to be. This should encourage us to repent and hope in the mercy of God ; for if the foresight of our sins has not prevented him from doing us good, the remembrance of our sins, if we repent, will not turn away his mercy from us.

When John the Baptist looked on Jesus as he walked, and said, " Behold the Lamb of God," one of the two which heard John speak was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother

Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he "brought him to Jesus." We do not read much of Andrew in the New Testament; but who ever did more for the world in an incidental way than he in bringing his brother to Christ? In heaven, he does not think that he lived in vain when he sees the fruit of Peter's ministry, and remembers that he first brought him to Jesus. When we bring a soul to Christ, we know not, we can not measure, its future influence. Among the crew with whom you sail, in your class in the Sabbath school, in your district as a tract distributor, in your visits among the shipping and to the Sailors' Home, God may employ you as the means of turning many to righteousness by bringing some soul to Christ. As fishers of men, we need to be contented with using the rod and line, if we may not employ the net; for one soul brought to Christ is worth a whole life of patient toil.

When Christ looked on Peter, he said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas;" the historian adds, "which is, by interpretation, a stone." The words of Christ were few and full of meaning, as are generally those of men who have great concerns at heart. With a foresight of Peter's relation to the church as one of the foundation stones among Apostles and Prophets, Christ gave him this

new and significant name, which the history of the church has verified.

After his first interview with him, having given him time to think upon his call, Christ went to Peter as he was employed in his daily labor, and called him, with Andrew, to be his follower. They arose and followed him. Before, they had merely been his disciples. Some time after, Peter said to Christ, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee." It seems that these two men forsook their employment at the time of their second call ; but we read afterwards of Christ using Peter's vessel, and of the disciples as being engaged in fishing ; so that they still, in some measure, followed their business, though they became disciples and followers of Christ. But their business was thenceforth, as ours should be, secondary to discipleship. But we are too apt to esteem our profession, our business, as our first concern, and discipleship to Christ as second in importance. Not so will it appear to us in death and in eternity.

Christ finds and leaves us free agents. He said to one man, "Follow me," who said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Another said, "Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house." If Peter had treated the call of Christ as some now treat it, and had delayed like them, it would have been the most

disastrous day of his life. He might have been a successful fisherman to the end of his days, and that would have been all. But now, at the great day when they draw the net ashore and gather the good into vessels and cast the bad away, this Apostle Peter will remember that day when Christ called him from the lake and made him fish in the great sea for us and millions more, who, by his instrumentality in part, will have been enclosed in that net. It is deeply affecting to see how every man has his special time of mercy, and improves it or neglects it. When Christ says to some of us, "Follow me," we may not know the time of our visitation.

Christianity began on the sea shore and with seamen. The employment of these men on their lake, no doubt, had a powerful effect in forming their characters, and developing their innate and widely differing dispositions. There is a great contrast between two of these men. Peter's bold, intrepid spirit, mingled with a little superstition, was nurtured by the hurricane and the dark, perilous nights. John's contemplative mind and his deeper feeling were cultivated by the sweet influences of the lake—its quiet bosom, the shadows of mountains and sky in it, the current of the river gliding through, and by the softer winds. What hours of thought must such a man as he have enjoyed upon that lake, receiving there, in

part, his education to write his meditative Gospel. Some of the greatest scholars who write upon the New Testament seem to think it greater praise to understand and explain the Gospel of John than any other part of the Bible. His Gospel has occasioned more learned disquisitions than any other; but many have marred his beautiful simplicity by their transcendental philosophy and sentimental conceits. He selects incidents, he dwells on passages, of the Saviour's life which the other evangelists either do not mention, or pass with barely alluding to them. The farewell discourse of Christ to his disciples, and his last prayer with them, took the deepest hold upon the memory and the thoughts of John. Let us notice here, as we proceed, the wisdom and beauty in the manner in which the Bible is composed; for while each writer is superintended by the Holy Spirit, so that every word is, in the sense of superintendence at least, inspired, and while the whole book has as really the authority of God as though it had been written on the throne of heaven, and had been sent to us visibly from the skies, the different temperaments, talents, tastes, genius, memories, education, style of the writers, are obvious in their several compositions. A figure of the Psalmist will furnish us with an illustration of what has now been said. He tells us that God's word is "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." We never taste two different portions

of honey which have exactly the same flavor. That flavor depends upon the fields from which the bees distil it. Different gardens have different proportions of flowers and sweet herbs, and the same fields have different flavors from year to year, varying with the proportions of sunshine and rain. God gives the bee his instinct, and his providence guides him ; but the varying landscapes infuse their secret, indefinable virtues into the products of his labor. Thus, while the word of God is all the richest honey, it partakes of the varieties of the objects to which its authors had been accustomed. Moses and Isaiah pierced the vigorous plants, and extracted powerful odors and juices from them ; David, the shepherd, loved the herbs and flowers which fed his lambs ; Habakkuk went up to the verdant crevices of rugged rocks ; John delighted in the branches and flowers that overhung the lake. How apt men are to forget that the God whom they do not love, but prefer created beauty and goodness to him, is himself the source of all beauty and taste, and not only creates every thing on the principle of true beauty, but, in composing a Bible for the human race, regards those principles in the style and manner of the book. He loves variety of genius and talent, and has established it among thrones and powers, and ordered it in those whom he selected to pen his word. Loving God supremely, let us like him rejoice in his works, and let us see that

religion in perfection is true beauty and true taste. Our employment in heaven, where we shall have no toils and cares to consume the most of our time as here, will, no doubt, be to contemplate God in his works and ways, to know and love the natures he has made, to study the depths of his wisdom and the riches of his beauty in creation, but especially in redemption. Some seem to think that creation is to be burned up at the last day; that we are to see nothing forever but an airy space, and be ourselves unsubstantial and ghostly; and therefore they think of death and a future state, without knowing the cause, with reluctance and terror. He who chose Peter and John from the same lake, and impressed their different characters upon the Bible, and thus upon the characters and thoughts of our race, is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and will never cease to discriminate and to manifest the riches of his wisdom and beauty in his endless works and ways.

The impression is irresistible in many minds, that, as Christ made his first selection of disciples and apostles from the lake, as Christianity thus began at the sea side, we are to see wonders of mercy and grace accomplished by those whose home is on the deep. There are many ways in which they are peculiarly qualified for great usefulness, and enjoy peculiar opportunities to do good. They are qualified for peculiar usefulness by the habit of thought and turn of

mind which they acquire by their calling. There is no class of men who, in general, are more eloquent than seamen. The nature of their illustrations, drawn from the most bold and striking objects and scenes in nature; their direct, forcible way of speaking, learned in shouting from the tops, in calling and answering in the blasts; their habit of promptness and energy in all they do; their observation of men and things in every degree of latitude; their proverbial benevolence of heart, taught them by their experience of privation and the necessity of kindness and humanity, and by the uncertain hold they have on life and property,—all make them masters of native eloquence when they stand up before their fellow-men, or when they speak in private. They will tell you a tale as no other class of men can do it; and what does their proverbial disposition to spin their stories indicate but a peculiar talent at observation, great reflection, and a knowledge of the things which touch the imagination and heart? In their social influence, then, in public and private, we see the eminent qualifications of a converted seaman to be a useful Christian. In thinking of the usefulness of seamen when converted, we err if we confine our thoughts to the more uninstructed among them, and forget how largely the sea has drawn its sons from other classes of society. Not unfrequently a child, surrounded with every thing to make him happy and useful at home, brought up,

also, in wealth and refinement, has an incontrollable desire to follow the sea, and, in many cases, to the disappointment and grief of parents and friends. On being resisted, sometimes the youth flees ; he is then looked upon by some as a fugitive and vagabond, and is given up as lost.

Now, we would say nothing, of course, to encourage young men to run away from their parents and go to sea without leave, nor would we make it appear that God sets a bounty on filial disobedience and unkindness. The way of transgressors is hard, and the way of the young rover is eminently hard. But think of the style and stamp of character which necessarily abounds among seamen, in consequence of the power of the sea to attract the bold, refractory, daring spirits who spurn authority and rule at home, and can not bear the restraints of trade and mechanic arts, nor the prisons and prison implements, as they deem them, of shops and handicraft. They fly to the sea ; the sea alone is wide enough for them to breathe in ; the sea has no doors ; the deck seems broader to their feet than a whole village or city ; they would “see many men and know their minds.” From this class of daring, reckless, spirits it is true that pirates and marauders rise ; but it is also true that from this class proceed many who are qualified by their native and hitherto untamed genius to do great good. John Newton, by his voyages and his dreadful experience

in Africa, was qualified for eminent usefulness to the church. Names familiar to every one illustrate the qualifications of converted seamen to do great good. If God should pour out his Spirit universally upon seamen, he would bring into his service as much native talent as by the conversion of any other class of men. If all the medical profession should be converted, if all at the bar should this day be brought into the church, they would not furnish more native talent, or effective qualifications to influence mankind, than the seamen of our navies and the mercantile marine.

Will you say, 'Where is their education?' Their education? They have taken every degree in the knowledge of the human heart. 'But many of them are rash, indiscreet, impulsive, and inconstant.' By these epithets you describe Simon Peter. If any of us had been counselors in setting up Christianity, and Simon Peter had been brought before us as a candidate for the apostleship, an apostle to the Jews, the learned, subtle, prejudiced Jew, and as a foundation stone, among apostles and prophets, for the Christian church, we should have dismissed him without a hearing. Perhaps you have been tempted to wonder that Christ did not lose patience with him. He was sometimes bold enough to walk on the very waves, and the next moment cried like a child for help. Who could depend on such a man? He was going to prison and to death for Christ, and though all men should forsake

Christ, not he. A little maid, by her casual question, turned his constancy into treachery with oaths and cursing. He draws his sword in a crowd, and cuts off a man's ear, and then follows his Master afar off. He was a strange mixture of hardihood and tenderness. The men around the fire looked upon one another and whispered, and then accused him of being a disciple. He braved their proof, and said, "Man, I am not." The cock crows, the eye of Christ turns upon him, he goes out and weeps bitterly. But Christ loved him, knowing that grace would make him a most desirable instrument for the work of an apostle. So has it been, so will it be, with many a fugitive from parental love, upon the deep. We have known some of the best of men, whose sons, after every advantage of education, and every faithful Christian effort, and in spite of prayers and tears without number on their behalf, have indicated a restless and roving spirit, and have gone into the forecastle, when we expected to see them in places of usefulness and honor upon the land. We would say to such parents, There may be a school for the child and a part of his education for the service of Christ such as you would not have chosen. God is dealing with you and yours in a way you can not understand. His way with you is in the sea, his path is in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known. Perhaps an untimely end awaits these children. But even then wait for the disclosures of eternity before

you judge with respect to the dealings of your covenant-keeping God with them and with you.

In this connection, let the appeal draw near to your understanding and heart to contribute for the spread of religion among seamen, to establish chapels for them and provide religious books. The accumulated religious publications which you can well spare will find a welcome and profitable use at the reading rooms of the Sailor's Homes, where they will be distributed among the chests* which are bound to sea. Care should be taken lest inadvertently you send an heretical tract or injudicious book, or a foolish, hurtful romance, to prevent or destroy all the good which the Bible and the best books might otherwise do. The forgetfulness of a captain to provide playing cards for a voyage left a young mariner nothing to do for amusement but to turn the pages of some religious books, which were blest to his conversion. Let affectionate, faithful Christians watch the arrival of crews, point them to suitable boarding houses, encourage their attendance on public worship, and thus a mother's prayers and a dying father's blessing may have their fulfillment in the conversion of many an erring child. If you had a sailor boy, would it not give you a deep interest in seamen? Would you not bless those who should be kind to him, and weep much if Christians should neglect opportunities to do him good? There are parental hearts which can bleed

besides yours, there are hearts which may be healed by your ministrations to the seamen's cause. Let us not think, however, that all seamen are like Simon Peter, before he was converted, or that the influence of seamen is all of a bold and striking character. There is many a noiseless, affectionate, faithful Andrew upon the deep; many a James ready to be the first martyr among the apostles; many a John, with the soul of a poet, and a largeness of heart "like the sand which is on the sea shore." The prophet says, "The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee." In the characters of seamen there is as great abundance as in the commerce that floats upon the deep, or the precious things that are buried in its sepulchres.

Much is said of their opportunities to do good. They have been, and, to some extent, are now, among the greatest hinderances to the propagation of the gospel. Officers and crews of vessels have been scourges to the islands and the continental shores in many seas, and when sailors are generally moral and religious men, "the multitude of the isles will be glad thereof." A missionary tells us that he knows of whole districts of country washed by the north Pacific which have been depopulated by vices introduced by seamen. New England, that happy name, has given that name around the globe to an article of her own manufacture and export which has been the besom

of destruction. The time will come when it will be as difficult to ship a crew to carry that article to a barbarous or semi-barbarous people, knowing that the principal use to be made of it will be to intoxicate, as to ship those men for piracy. Great progress has been made in raising the condition and character of seamen. There were formerly but few boarding houses appropriated to them to which the friends of seamen felt that they could safely direct them. There are now in all our ports many places where they are protected from injustice and furnished with means of moral improvement. Such influence has no limits but those of the earth. It is like disinfecting a pestilential wind, and making it like the sweet south, breathing health and joy wherever it comes. The Spirit of God is moving on the face of the great deep. A letter from a missionary at Lahaina, Sandwich Islands, some time since, stated that three ships were then riding at anchor there, whose crews had been the subjects of divine grace in their respective voyages to those islands. The blessed Spirit visits these floating habitations on their solitary way along the deep, recalling other days and scenes in the house of God, and making thoughts of home and parents, or the Bible and tracts which your kindness has placed on board, the means of turning the heart of the sailor to his God. Not long since the Lord's supper was administered on board a United States ship of war at sea to more than twenty communicants.

Jesus, walking on the Sea of Galilee, thereby signified to all the world that the sea is his, and that he will have dominion from the river to the ends of the earth. That little sea was no smaller in proportion to the globe than all the scenes and labors of his earthly life were to his universal triumph. We will aid him to bring all the sons of the deep to obey him. Missionaries can not do their work effectually without them. Pray for the sailors. Let every blast which presses against your window be as though you heard a bell calling you to prayer for them. They die and perish by hundreds in their full strength; they go not from sick beds, but in all the vigor of health, into eternity. In 1853, four hundred and eighty vessels were reported as lost, and two thousand lives with them. The average life of sailors is now about eleven years and a half. There are supposed to be three millions of seamen, of whom three hundred thousand are British, and two hundred thousand American, in all five hundred thousand speaking the English tongue.

The county of Barnstable in Massachusetts numbers over a thousand widows of mariners, and more than five thousand of their fatherless children. In a storm several years since, twenty-three husbands and fathers belonging to the single town of Truro perished. What we do for seamen we should emphatically do with our might.

A collection of facts in the conversion and religious experience of seamen would excite great interest and make a powerful impression. All our seamen's chaplains are in possession of numerous materials for such a collection. One tells us of a sailor boy, who, on being converted at sea, finding no place where he could pray aloud, went up the mast to the cross-trees, day and night, and poured out his prayer. Another tells us of a Christian sailor in a religious meeting speaking to this effect: 'Sometimes when upon deck in my watch I employ myself in counting the stars. I mark off a small place in the heavens, and begin to count; but the more I count, the thicker do the stars come out. So, when I am thinking and speaking of Jesus, it seems as though I could never stop. Brethren, there are unsearchable riches in Jesus.' Another tells us of a seaman on his dying bed, who, being asked by a fellow-sailor, What cheer? said, "Heaven heaves in sight; I see the headland." The next day the question was repeated, What cheer? The reply was, "Rounding the cape; almost in." The third day, the question was repeated, What cheer? "In port," his quivering lips replied, and the next moment, "Let go the anchor."

The simple-hearted, generous love of a converted sailor for his Redeemer and Friend excites—it can not be otherwise—peculiar love on the part of Christ. The Saviour loves just such attachment, such impulses

of affection as those of a truly converted sailor, and all the more for the genuine nature which there is in them. We need not hesitate, perhaps, to repeat the anecdote of a rough son of the ocean, who, being wrought upon by preaching, stood up, and in the first impulse of true submission to his Maker, his face flooded with tears, waved his hat, and gave a cheer, using the name of God. That was his way of saying, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof;" nor did Gabriel, perhaps, ever say, 'Hosanna,' more sincerely or acceptably to God. The interest and love which such a man awakens in you is deeper far in the heart of Christ. Judging from the interest which certain individuals awakened in him when on earth, we are constrained to feel that there are none whom he loves more than the sons of the ocean, when, amidst temptations, opposition, bad influences of every kind, in perils of waters, in perils in the city, in deaths oft, they love and serve him with all their hearts. We will think of Christ as the seamen's Friend, pledging his friendship for them by one of the first acts of his life. Let all who preach to seamen, let all who are specially devoted in any way to efforts for their good, be encouraged in thinking of Christ as the seamen's Friend. In grateful recollection of the fishermen of Galilee, let us help the Seamen's Friend Societies, and when their cause is presented to us, let us seem to

hear Andrew and Peter, James and John, pleading with us for their brethren. To whom would they be drawn with stronger interest, should they revisit earth, than to their brethren on our lakes and seas? Look into that narrow place in the ship, see that dim lamp, watch that storm-beaten, weather-stained face of the seaman, as he reads in a Bible which you have procured for him, that He who made "Arcturus, Orion, Pleiades, and the chambers of the south," and who "alone treadeth on the waves of the sea," loves him, and gave himself for him, and says to him, even to him, Follow me. Let no sister of such as he, through our neglect, mourn over his hopeless death, and have occasion to say, "Lord, if thou hadst been there, my brother had not died." The surface of the deep will one day be alive with the hundreds of thousands who sleep in it. May we have reason to think that some of them by our means had made Christ, who was their Friend, the Saviour of their souls.

X.

JOHN.



THEN PETER, TURNING ABOUT, SEETH THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED FOLLOWING, WHICH ALSO LEANED ON HIS BREAST AT SUPPER, AND SAID, LORD, WHICH IS HE THAT BETRAYETH THEE ?

JOHN alone tells us that he is that disciple whom Jesus loved, and in five instances he uses that designation of himself which no other evangelist has applied to him. He tells us that at the last supper “there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved ;” that Jesus from the cross saw “his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved ;” that Mary Magdalene ran with the news of the resurrection to Simon Peter, “and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved ;” that when Jesus appeared to the disciples at Tiberias after his resurrection, “that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord ;” and that Peter, having had his own violent death disclosed to him by Christ, “turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved follow-

ing, which also leaned upon his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee ? ”

It is unnecessary to say that this disciple was gratified with this name — a new name, which the love of his adorable Master had written upon him ; but while a friend and favorite of a royal person might be expected to place great value upon a name or title conferred by his king, to be used by others in addressing him, it is unusual to designate one's self as having been specially beloved ; and it is the more unusual when others do not thus refer to him. Some would be liable to the imputation of vanity under these circumstances ; but a man whom Christ loved may be trusted to speak of himself. Selfishness in him will be controlled by humility — ambition and vanity be displaced by simplicity and godly sincerity. His being beloved by Christ presents itself to the mind of John as a truth rather than a cause for vain glory. Unconscious of wrong motives in speaking of it, he is not jealous that others will envy him ; and at the same time, only one who was conscious that his conduct would bear criticism would be willing to use a designation of himself which would be sure to invite the strictest scrutiny of his words and actions. Praise has the effect upon a good man to make him humble ; it makes him think how many things there are in him not discerned by others, which, if known, he supposes would lessen their approbation, and that at

least God knows them, and it therefore seems a light thing to be judged of man's judgment. If love and approbation from a good man greatly esteemed thus discloses our unworthiness, and acts as an incentive to goodness, the love of Christ to John must have had a subduing and purifying effect upon his character. While it left him still a frail mortal, it gave him confidence in his motives, and made him transparent in his feelings and conduct; so that, with the strength and dignity of a man, he nevertheless had the artless simplicity of a child who speaks of loving and being loved with no imputation or suspicion from us of being vain.

There is an incident in the history of John which is a striking illustration of this simplicity of character proceeding from a conscience void of offence, and at the same time it presents us with the strongest form of testimony from others to the purity of his character, and shows us the relation between him and Christ.

At the last supper "Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting* of whom he spake." Matthew says, "And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one to say unto him, Lord, is it I?" Christ gave an answer, but Matthew does not tell us particularly how that answer was obtained. John completes the narration. He says, "Now, there was

leaning upon Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake." Why did not Simon, with his usual confidence, himself put that question? No place at that table was too remote for the question to be heard, or for any particular significance in it to be perceived. It was not, therefore, because of John's being next to Christ that he was thus employed by Simon to get that answer. While it is unquestionably true that the Saviour's known affection for John may have been supposed to give him a peculiar privilege in putting such a question, it can hardly be doubted that there was another reason which influenced Simon to employ John to reiterate that solemn question for the twelve — to address it to the Saviour with the more deliberate and noticeable appeal of one pathetic voice and one bursting heart interceding for the rest. But why, we repeat, did not Simon's heart and Simon's voice act on this occasion, as they had been so ready to do at other times? The answer is probably to be found in the nature of the question. It were easy to join with eleven fellow-disciples, and say, "Lord, is it I?" for we read that "Judas also, which betrayed him, answered, and said, Master, is it I?" But for one voice to break the silence after all had spoken, and, prominently assuming the appearance of conscious innocence and strength in virtue, to seem bent on ob-

taining the answer, required a confidence in one's own character which even beloved Peter did not seem to possess. There was one present, however, who Peter knew was preëminently qualified to put that question — one who he knew could afford to ask it, could be safe in asking it; while one of those singular presentiments which we can not explain may at that moment have been casting its shadow upon the spirit of Peter, to chill and to damp that zeal which wholly failed soon after in the hour of trial. O, there was but one — the solitude of Herod's judgment seat, the loneliness of the crucifixion, proved that there was but one — at that table who was qualified to put that question for the rest while the rest were silent — to put it, not in a formal manner, but expecting a reply which might not only make a guilty conscience quail, but would also terrify a heart which was not more than usually filled with the perfect love which casteth out fear. One such heart was beating so near the heart of Jesus at that moment that the two might have felt each the other's pulsation — the heart of one who never for a moment forsook his Friend in trouble and sorrow, but when a cloud had covered him like the sun at his going down, and veiled the stars, stood visible through the mist, an evening star, the lone witness of his Lord. To him one beckons that he should demand, with the strength of suspected, injured, yet conscious love, which of them should do this thing.

Who of us would be willing to stand forth in the name of the company of disciples to which he belongs, and say, "Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?" Each of us can join his voice with the rest, and say, "Lord, is it I?" But where is the disciple to whom the rest of us may beckon that he should ask for us, 'Lord, who is it?'

John never forgot that he was the disciple selected by Peter to put that question; for, with the same simplicity which the consciousness of love and faithfulness inspires, he tells us in the text not only that he is that disciple whom Jesus loved, but "which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?" As the effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much, John's question obtained an answer; but, on close examination of the narrative, we shall find that the answer was whispered to him, and that the rest of the company did not hear it. True, Matthew gives the answer, but he does not say in what manner it was obtained. It was enough for the purposes of the narrative to say what the answer proved to be; but that the disciples did not learn it before Judas put the question for himself, is, in the opinion of the best commentators, made certain by the account which is given by John. Preëminent goodness, and great proficiency in wickedness, John and Judas, each can boldly say, "Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?"

This secret communication of Christ to John is an illustration of their intimate relations, and of the confidence which Christ felt in the character of the beloved disciple. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." Beautiful instances do we find in the Bible of this confiding of secrets in the intercourse of God with man. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." Perhaps the most affecting instance of this is the disclosure to the child Samuel of the divine purposes, it being foreseen that Samuel would be a man in whom the Most High could trust. Though God now makes no disclosures to good men respecting things to come, the Bible teaches us that "the pure in heart shall see God;" that "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." The willingness of John to relate, as we may say, his religious experience, to speak of intimate love and special favors from Christ, is one of the best evidences of the purity of his feelings, the absence from his heart and life of all those inconsistencies of allowed sin which, through the power of conscience, would have prevented these disclosures to the world of special intimacy with Christ.

Let us not think of John as a soft character, win-

ning the love of Christ for inoffensive, amiable, gentle qualities. Such was not the disciple whom Jesus loved. If he inherited any thing of his mother's disposition, he was far from being such a man. That mother must have been a remarkable woman ; for none but a woman of high spirit, supreme ambition, good address, intense love for her children bearing her onward to strange adventure in their behalf, would have led her to do the thing which chiefly marks her character.

She supposed that Christ was to be an earthly potentate ; she would bespeak the two highest offices in his kingdom for her two sons. Her request is not the spiritual, humble prayer of another, on a different occasion : " Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Irrespective of qualifications and claims on the part of others, with a high opinion, no doubt, of her children's talents, she, though the wife of a fisherman of Galilee, made bold to present her sons as candidates for the highest places under the reign of Messiah. It is true, she was Salome, the sister, or cousin, as many suppose, of Mary, the mother of Christ, and perhaps she presumed on this relation. She was at the cross and at the tomb of Christ. To be the mother of two such sons — James, the first martyr among the apostles, and John, his brother — gave her the honorable designation by which she is known. She was, indeed, " a joyful mother of children." If the saying be true, that " mind is from the

mother," the mother of John is for more than one reason blessed among women. She felt, with more reason than most parents have, that her children were deserving of honor and confidence. But her sons instigated her. Ambitious sons are more sure of disinterested service from their mothers than from any other relative or friend. Mark gives the narrative with one of those discrepancies without which there would have been less use in employing four men to write the history of Christ. Matthew, being one of the twelve, forbears to blame his brethren, though "the ten began to be much displeased with James and John." But Mark, not being of the number, lays the blame where it was chiefly deserved. The Saviour also, in his reply, addressed himself to the two brethren, and not to their mother. It required no little nerve to rise up among their equals in the family of Christ, and make such a request in their hearing. This uninstructed, unsanctified ambition, when brought under control, entered largely into the Christian characters of these two men, and with other bold traits, no doubt, interested their Master in them in no ordinary degree. A similar disposition in another disciple, Simon Peter, made him also an object of special love with Christ. It was James and John that proposed to bring fire from heaven upon the Samaritans. That they were far from being men of naturally soft and gentle dispositions appears furthermore from this, that "James, the son

of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, he sur-named Boanerges, which is, The Sons of Thunder." These men, with Peter, were the Saviour's most intimate companions ; they went with him to his transfiguration, and to the Garden of Gethsemane. We therefore see that the disciple whom Jesus loved had all the attributes of a man. Softness in a man may create a certain degree of love for him in others ; but the highest love is awakened only by forcible, manly qualities, subdued by goodness. It is not sweetness of disposition which makes a man greatly and extensively beloved ; it may be so with a child, but force of character is essential in a man, and though occasionally excessive, it does not diminish, but rather increases love. Instead of sweetness, a man, in order to be greatly loved, must have something in his character corresponding to a subacid, or to what we call, in certain fruits, a pleasant sour ; we must see that it is in him ; he must have grit as well as grace ; be capable of something besides pathos, melting moods, repose. And in this disciple we have already seen, and on further examination may be still more convinced, that all the elements of a manly character were found in him in right proportions.

There is no sacred writer, not even Paul, who is more bold and strong in his denunciations of false teachers than the apostle John in his Epistles. With the gentleness of a child, he also has stern authority,

profound contempt, intense hatred, on proper occasions. His organ, indeed, breathes the air and the treble of delicious music ; but there is a bass there, and a swell. They who supposed that leaning on Jesus' bosom made him effeminate, found to their cost that his anger at their wickedness was more like the wrath of the Lamb than that of any other apostle, by reason of those deepened feelings with regard to truth and error, and that intense love for the souls of men which communion with the Saviour had created.

One thing in John strikes us with great force, not only as illustrating his character, but that of his adored Redeemer. Here is a man admitted to the most familiar love of Christ, made the partner of his more private experiences, his bosom friend ; and yet no one of all the sacred writers has so much as he to say of the Godhead of Christ. This is powerful testimony to the divine nature of Him in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. To know more of him, is to worship him with the more reverence and godly fear ; familiar intimacy and love with regard to him do not beget lightness, nor tempt to unsuitable freedom in thought or speech. When he who leaned on Jesus' bosom first opens his lips to speak of Christ, instead of telling us what favors he had enjoyed, what bliss he had experienced in his intimacy with him, it seems as though he could not repress his adoring thoughts, but strikes at once a chord

worthy of Gabriel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." There must have been in John qualities of mind and heart which laid the foundation for the deepest affection on the part of Christ.

Himself the only perfect man, his judgment of character, his testimony to the excellence of this disciple will assist us to see in what ways and on what grounds his approbation and love are to be sought and expected. Let us therefore consider a few things suggested by this subject.

1. *Faults of character, which are the result of strong passions, should not discourage us.* For these passions are the motive power or the driving wheels in character; under control and well directed, they are indispensable to the highest forms of excellence. James and John and Simon Peter are illustrations and proofs of this. But where the faults of character are of a different kind, where they are defects, or deficiencies, there is far more room for apprehension. Want of truthfulness, meanness, intense selfishness, are alarming indications that there is as yet no solid basis for a good character. These must be exchanged for their opposites before we can begin to possess a character which even men, and, which is of infi-

nately more importance, the Searcher of hearts, can approve.

Another thing which is taught us here is, —

2. *Christ loves character as well as piety.* Emotions without good character and its fruits; to say, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not to do the things which he says; to call him ‘Saviour,’ and to dwell upon the pathetic parts of his character and life, and not to keep his commandments, must be revolting to him. It is so to us. We have no respect for the feelings which people cherish or express any further than they are the fruits of goodness, or are confirmed and sustained by a good character. We serve a Master who is to be the final Judge of every human being, and will render to every man according to his works. “All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.” He looks beneath our words and forms. We must not obtrude upon him any sickly, hollow expressions of love; but let us endeavor each to be, as well as to do, that which will lay the foundation for his approval and friendship. Character, not piety alone, character made by religion, is demanded of us. Hear the beloved disciple on this point: “Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.”

But there is this further instruction in the love of Christ for John. His preference of John, with his contemplative mind, to Peter, teaches that

3. *Deep reflection and feeling are greatly appreciated by Christ.* John was sufficiently a practical man ; he was not sluggish, nor tame ; he labored for his generation, he rebuked the sins and errors of his day, and suffered banishment for his zeal. But withal he was of a contemplative, thoughtful turn ; things in the Saviour's life struck him deeply which are either not mentioned by the other evangelists, or are passed by with a brief allusion. That last conversation and prayer of Christ with his disciples are perfectly congenial with his habits of thought and feeling ; we see the heart and mind of Christ more in John than in the other evangelists ; their writings, as one expresses it, are history, but his are mystery. The thoughts, the conversation of such a friend must have been grateful to Christ ; and above all, to such a listening pupil the Saviour must have found it very pleasant to speak, for he was sure to have in John one into whose deep heart his thoughts descended, to be most fully appreciated and reproduced. Nor was he disappointed. John's Gospel was the last of the four narratives of the life of Christ ; and without disparaging the rest, (for they have their indispensable use as well as peculiar excellence,) in certain frames of mind we are almost tempted to say that "the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim is better than the vintage of Abiezer." We are like the ruler of the feast at Cana when he said, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

We must not take John, however, as a model man, after whose pattern every character is to be wrought. There is only one instance of perfect human character. But, moreover, there are men of different and almost opposite good qualities, who are indispensably useful. For example, John, though beloved of Christ as a companion and friend, might not have been so good an apostle to the Gentiles as Paul ; yet Paul, whose Epistle to the Romans John could hardly have written, could not have written parts of John's Gospel and his Epistles so well as he. Paul himself found it necessary to reprove the favoritism of the early Christians, who insisted, some that one character and teacher were preferable, while others were equally attached to different instructors and a different tone of doctrine. Paul, in his parable of the members and senses of the human body, teaches them and us that one apostle can not be exalted as a model above another.

4. *Christ can have peculiar affection for a particular disciple.* We are not in his view like the long and uniformed ranks of soldiers to the eye of a military commander. "He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out ;" he knows the history, temptations, trials, secret thoughts, character, and conduct of every one of his friends. We can not be nor do any thing which is right but he appreciates it fully, rejoices in it, and will encourage and reward it. True, we can not write a Gospel, but we can be the Gospel personi-

fied by its influence on our hearts and lives. No other disciple has just the opportunity to be and to do that which belongs to each of us ; if faithful in our few things, we shall gain the approbation of Christ ; if we follow him, we shall be with him where he is ; if we overcome, we shall sit with him on his throne.

We have in John an illustration of the Saviour's power to honor and bless those on whom he sets his love. Before he makes them honored and blessed, he will show them how great things they must suffer for his sake. John must go an exile to that bleak, inhospitable Patmos, a picture of desolation and loneliness, as travelers have described it ; but there what honors and joys await him ! There the Son of man appears to him, who, when parted from him in Galilee, left on his mind the impressions of the cross and the tomb. But now he comes with insupportable glory and majesty. He who once leaned on his bosom falls at his feet as dead. " And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not ; I am the first and the last ; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death." Then he made disclosures to this beloved disciple of scenes and things, the like of which had never been revealed before — the whole future history of time, the heavenly world, the deeps of hell, the final day, the judgment throne, the gathered race, the end of the world. All these he was inspired to

describe in language which furnishes the church of God on earth with its conceptions of the things unseen and eternal. He closes up the Bible with a book which is the western sky of revelation, at once gorgeous and beautiful, sublime and pathetic, a close and a foretoken, a seal of one day, but full of signs for the next. O greatly beloved ! what a life, what a heaven, what an eternity are thine ! We go back and read the beginning of all this glory and joy in these simple words : “ And Jesus, going on from thence, saw other two brethren, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets ; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.” This leaving all for Christ, of which the Saviour so frequently speaks, this prompt, entire surrender of ourselves to him, brings enduring riches and honor. Some who hear these words have a call from Christ like that of John. If you should make Christ your Friend, as he did, see in his history what things Christ has prepared for them that love him.

The religious views of such a man as John, presented in a condensed form, must be of great value. Such a presentation he has given us in three Epistles. As we read them, we see what things, in the opinion of such a man, are of chief interest and importance. We remember what were his opportunities to gain instruction from the fountain head of truth. As we

consider those writings, one thing which is interesting and instructive is, that this disciple whom Jesus loved, this ‘perfect man,’ as we must regard him, in the scriptural sense of that expression, tells us in these Epistles, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” Every Christian may feel stronger and take encouragement, as he hears one who leaned on Jesus’ bosom protest that he himself is a man of like passions with us.

We discover in John’s Epistles, that, in his view, love is the sum and substance of all Christian duty. His own heart is filled with it, and even to old age it overflows toward his adorable Master, and to his fellow-men. This he learned in the school of Christ. This was the effect of the Saviour’s love to him.

“A scholar apt thou cam’st to be,
And loved’st mankind as Christ loved thee.”

But while the burden of his Epistles is, “God is love;” “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us;” “Beloved, let us love one another;” no Apostle is more exclusive in his feelings and words with regard to false teachers. It might be said to him as Christ said through him to the church at Ephesus, “I know thy works and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil.” “But

this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." The tradition that John fled from a public bath when he heard that Cerinthus, a noted heretic, had been in it just before him, is not in itself improbable, in view of all which he says respecting 'antichrists,' 'deceivers,' 'them that seduce you,' and in view of this passage in his Second Epistle: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." The effect of clear and strong religious views in this Apostle was to make him abhor false teachers. False liberality is not only cruel in its effects—it is a bad sign in us; no man can have true apostolic views in religion and not feel strongly against error.

What is love to God, love to Christ? How may I know that I possess it? Were John upon the earth, we would all go far to hear him answer these questions; for who more than he is qualified to tell us what is love? But we have in his Epistles a definition of love, clear and concise. It is in his Second Epistle: "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments."

No letter ever began more happily than his Third Epistle, in these words: "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things, that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." 'I wish

that you may be as happy as you are good.' Few of us would be willing to be only as happy as we are good. These words are full of meaning as you look on the sick, leaning upon the Saviour's breast and sweetly regarding his word, "tarry till I come:" — "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth." Could these dear friends recover and dwell among us with their present views and feelings, what hallowed places would our families, our churches, our Christian circles be! Why shall we who survive fail to live as we suppose they would?

"For us they languish, and for us they die;
And shall they languish, shall they die, in vain?"

There are yet those who lean on Jesus' bosom; it is a place to which every soul may have access. One in a neighboring town,* whom some of you followed to the tomb yesterday, 'leaned her head, and breathed her life out sweetly, there.' Her last articulate words were, "Thy kingdom come." Sublime triumph of supreme love to God, taking the place of the selfishness which suffering frequently brings with it, and rising superior even to natural affection, though stronger in death than ever. We must take the religion of dying beds, the elevation of faith, the purity of love, the uniformity of peace, which we there witness, and make them the

* Marblehead: Oct. 28, 1854.

rule and manner of our life. We must, with John, and with those from among us who inherit the promises, live near to Christ every day, by walking after his commandments, "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," "and grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

XI.

THOU SHALT NEVER WASH MY FEET.



PETER SAITH UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT NEVER WASH MY FEET. JESUS ANSWERED HIM, IF I WASH THEE NOT, THOU HAST NO PART WITH ME.

THESE words relate to one of the most surprising acts of the Saviour's life. So incredible did it seem that it excited in Peter, who seems to have spoken for the rest, a feeling of opposition. It is supposed by some that in washing the disciples' feet Christ began with Peter. In his ardent and ready way he resisted the approach of Christ as he came to kneel before him and perform the act which none but menial servants ever did. Seeing the Saviour proceeding to perform this act, it was the natural outbreak of his feelings of propriety, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Lesser acts of condescension and kindness from our friends sometimes have a similar effect on us; our sense of fitness is violated when some who are above us, or for whom we cherish great regard, in the fullness of their love perform, or offer to perform,

services which belong to other hands and to a different station. Here was that Lord and Master whose divine power and majesty the disciples had seen when he opened blind eyes, healed lepers, cured the paralytics, raised the dead, and curbed the rage of devils — the great Messiah, the Son of the living God, the Teacher to whom the multitudes had listened as they had never listened to human lips, approaching with the necessary preparations to wash the feet of Peter and Iscariot, and the other disciples. “Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered, and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” This was not enough to overcome the instinctive repugnance of the disciple; that repugnance had in a moment grown to resolute resistance. “Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

Are we not sometimes conscious of feelings, and do we not sometimes notice feelings in others, not unlike those of Peter when he used these words?

We have perhaps felt, and have heard others say, that God can not be supposed to regard our little affairs. An infinite Being, reigning over a universe, a great God and a great King, it is not to be supposed, some say or think, that he can hear our prayers, or that he will concern himself about the circumstances of poor, insignificant creatures like us. If we were

angels of his presence, we might expect some particular regard ; but how can we suppose that he will stoop to man, ‘ that is a worm, and to the son of man, which is a worm ? ’

But when we come to the work of redemption and salvation, the hearts of men are prone to suggest further difficulties. They sometimes object that the plan of salvation is incredible, considering the distance between God and man. That the Word, who was God, should be made flesh, that He who made all things, being made flesh, should give himself up as a sacrifice, that human guilt should be atoned for by the offering up of his body once for all, is, with some, too much even for faith ; and to some who admit all this without much reflection, the gospel which contains these mysteries of condescension is like magnificent fables which they have never investigated, having the feeling still that it must be something exaggerated. It is the language of embellishment — of a glowing zeal — of rhetorical preaching ; it never can be true in a literal sense. There seems to be an impossibility in the nature of things that God should show such love and condescension to men ; and, having come to this conclusion, many do not receive the gospel, and for that reason. We have met with some who expressed the wish that the idea of the gospel could be stated to them in a more simple manner as to its facts ; for the representations of the love of Christ to

men which they hear from the pulpit they can not but regard as far beyond the truth. We should all probably be surprised to know to what extent and in what great variety this feeling exists in the minds of many estimable hearers of the gospel. The preaching of Christ and him crucified, with its representations of love and compassion, has no effect upon them, for this reason — that, while they do not accuse us of misrepresentation, they have no ideas respecting the condescension and love of God to which these representations can make an effectual appeal. There is yet no staple in the mind to which this link can attach itself, and therefore it is that the preaching of Christ and him crucified, has so little effect on many serious hearers. They do not feel their guilt and condemnation to be such as to require and warrant all which has been done to save them. When they awake to a proper knowledge of sin, its intrinsic guilt, its consequences, and the natural difficulty in the way of pardon, all the condescension and love of Christ, all his sufferings and his death, seem justified by the worth of the soul and its redemption. It has never become, as yet, a part of their knowledge that there is really any such feeling on the part of God and Christ toward sinners as the gospel represents. This knowledge, or the entrance of this idea, is like the opening of the eyes of one who had been born blind. In no other way than this can you account for the total

insensibility with which many well-disposed hearers listen for years to the preaching of the gospel. They wish to be instructed, they wish to believe, they wish to be saved. You wonder why they are not at once melted by the story of a Saviour's love, why they need to hear it the second time before they are influenced by it, and how they can hear it for years and not be moved. The reason, let it be repeated, is in many cases this — with a ready consent to the general truths of religion, some have no idea of the condescension and love of Christ, chiefly because they do not feel their need of such compassion as the gospel describes, and also because it seems impossible for the great God and Saviour to have such feelings toward them. Therefore, all that is said of the love of Christ, and of his sacrifice for them, is hardly regarded by them with more emotion than if you should tell a young child, for example, that an emperor had expressed a strong desire for the child's happiness, or any other representation which the child can not appreciate, partly because it feels no need of such regard, and partly because it could not conceive or believe that a distant and great personage should feel any concern about a child in a foreign land. Thus, with many, the infinite compassion and love of God and Christ toward them is something of which they have never yet felt their need, and therefore concerning which they have no faith.

This appears in a still more striking manner in the feelings and conduct of such persons when they are at last awakened to a proper knowledge of their sinfulness, and their need of something to reconcile them to God. It is known to every one who has ever seen or heard of such cases, how long we seek in vain for something to satisfy an awakened and guilty conscience—how we try repentance, and reformation, and prayer, and various methods, to find favor with God, but in vain. The complaint is, that we have not felt enough, have not made up the required sum of acceptable feelings, or the feelings are not sufficiently pure and good; and this, too, in those who have always listened to the preaching of the gospel. We may well ask why they do not recur instantly to the free pardon procured by atoning blood. When we are sick, and know what will cure, we think at once of the remedy, and resort to it. “Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?” Yes; and the sinner has heard of them his life long. The way of salvation has been explained, illustrated, enforced; but he tries every other means of relief before he comes to Christ. Still he does not understand, it has never been revealed to his mind, how Christ feels toward him. He feels guilty and unworthy, and he supposes, naturally enough, that God has the same aversion to him which he feels to himself; and the idea that the Saviour loved him and gave himself for

him, is yet beyond his apprehension ; and, generally, the only way in which it is at last received is, the sinner submits to God without knowing how God can forgive sin. We do not understand the way of justification by grace through faith alone till, in the act of complying with it, it is disclosed to us ; “ for flesh and blood hath not revealed it.” The Holy Ghost takes the things which are Christ’s and shows them unto us. Cowper, in his experience, expressed this sinful ignorance of the human mind with regard to the plan of justification by grace up to the moment of unconditional submission : —

“ Thus, afraid to trust his grace,
Long time did I rebel,
Till, despairing of my case,
Down at his feet I fell ;
Then my stubborn heart he broke,
And subdued me to his sway ;
With a single word he spoke, —
‘ Thy sins are done away.’ ”

Thus the sinner is forced to believe that God loves him, and that the Saviour has had compassion on him, and died for him in particular, as well as for the whole world. “ Who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

If all who hear the gospel with a serious mind really believed and felt all which they hear of the infinite love and condescension of Christ to them, the gospel would have more effect than we now witness.

abased very low before we can understand the character of Christ. He that rode into Jerusalem, sitting upon an ass's colt, meek, and bringing salvation; he that received sinners, and ate with them; he that called a wicked publican and extortioner from a tree, and before the people said, "I must abide at thy house," — acts on principles with which our poor notions of propriety can not square; and we, like many in his day, are tempted to go away and walk no more with him. We need, as they did, to hear him say, "And blessed is he who-soever shall not be offended in me." We need to accept this gracious invitation, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." It may be said with truth to many, You are not willing to admit that Christ feels towards you as he does; you do not in your thoughts permit him to suffer and die for you, as he came from heaven to do.

Come, then, let us go together, and look into that manger at Bethlehem, and see the mystery of the incarnation — God manifested in the flesh. Feel not that you condescend in doing so. The multitude of the heavenly hosts have been there before you; their song lingers in the air, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Say now, as you look at God manifest in the flesh, lying in that humble state, Was it for you that this is done? No, you are tempted to say, it was for the

world. Here is your mistake. That life was manifested, that babe was born, that God manifest in the flesh lies there, for you, and for no other more than for you. The feeling is, perhaps, I can not permit this; I am willing that this should take place for the world. You must be willing that it should all be done for you. You must do in faith to that infant, that which an aged saint did eight days after in the temple, — in the exercise of faith, you must, as it were, take up that child Jesus into your arms, and say with Simeon, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Go with me again, and what do we behold? Three men asleep, and at a distance from them, beneath those aged olive trees, from a prostrate form, we hear this cry: “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done.” An angel comes to him amid the ~~darkness~~ of the night, to cheer the *moon* *light* intenser darkness of his soul. Angel, tell us why it is necessary that he should drink that cup; he can not bear it; the thought of it convulses his frame; there at rest, there on the ground, there in the cold night air, the thought of it makes him sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling from him. Why must he drink that cup? The answer, as true as any which could be given, is this: He must drink it, O man, for you. This is the burden of your guilt; these woes are part of the ransom for your soul. Are you willing? Shall he drink it for you?

abased very low before we can understand the character of Christ. He that rode into Jerusalem, sitting upon an ass's colt, meek, and bringing salvation ; he that received sinners, and ate with them ; he that called a wicked publican and extortioner from a tree, and before the people said, " I must abide at thy house," — acts on principles with which our poor notions of propriety can not square ; and we, like many in his day, are tempted to go away and walk no more with him. We need, as they did, to hear him say, " And blessed is he who-soever shall not be offended in me." We need to accept this gracious invitation, " Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." It may be said with truth to many, You are not willing to admit that Christ feels towards you as he does ; you do not in your thoughts permit him to suffer and die for you, as he came from heaven to do.

Come, then, let us go together, and look into that manger at Bethlehem, and see the mystery of the incarnation — God manifested in the flesh. Feel not that you condescend in doing so. The multitude of the heavenly hosts have been there before you ; their song lingers in the air, " Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Say now, as you look at God manifest in the flesh, lying in that humble state, Was it for you that this is done ? No, you are tempted to say, it was for the

world. Here is your mistake. That life was manifested, that babe was born, that God manifest in the flesh lies there, for you, and for no other more than for you. The feeling is, perhaps, I can not permit this; I am willing that this should take place for the world. You must be willing that it should all be done for you. You must do in faith to that infant, that which an aged saint did eight days after in the temple, — in the exercise of faith, you must, as it were, take up that child Jesus into your arms, and say with Simeon, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

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Stand yet nearer to a more affecting scene. That cup is at his lips. They have scourged him, crowned him with thorns, blindfolded him, buffeted him, led him to Calvary, nailed him to the tree; he is dying. For whom is he dying? For that centurion? that scribe, that Mary Magdalene, that man with the sponge raising it to his dying lips? No, not for them any more than for one who was to live eighteen hundred years after, and who at this moment hears me put this question to him. Are you willing to believe that that death was all for you? Do you gratefully acknowledge this? Say not, It is for the world, and not for me. Where do you expect to be when the world is at his bar? You will not be there, perhaps? Surely you will be there; and who will need more than you to hear the Judge answer, "Come, ye blessed;" whose soul is more precious than yours; to whom will Heaven be more than to you, or who can dwell with the devouring fire, who can dwell with everlasting burnings, with less of woe than you; and, therefore, whom of all our sinful race should God love rather than you?

If by the grace of God we could awaken in the mind of any one the feeling, "He loved me, and gave himself for me," if you would sincerely and fully admit to yourself, 'All this is for me, as much as for the world; I will recognize Christ as mine; I will appropriate his coming from heaven, his agony, his

death ; no one shall lessen my part in Christ ; he is all mine, and I will feel toward him and act accordingly,' — we should hope that the Son of God had won a triumph that would be told in heaven, and repeated in your songs of praise forever. It must be so, it must come to this ; as you will feel and admit, when you consider the reply which Christ made to Peter's unwillingness to receive his act of grace.

For we may consider Christ as addressing to you substantially the reply which he made to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." But observe here, it was not the mere washing of the feet, of course, that Christ meant, or that would benefit Peter. It was receiving Christ as a condescending Saviour, signified by letting Christ wash his feet, which was to save Peter's soul. He seems to say to him, 'I know it appears to you great condescension, that I should wash your feet, but this is a small part of the lesson which you are to learn with regard to my condescension. I shall stoop to the lowest hell to raise you up ; no tongue can tell what I am to do and endure for you, what sacrifice, what sufferings, I must bear for you. Do not stumble nor be offended at this washing of your feet ; this is nothing to that which you will hereafter see and feel that I have done for you ; "for what I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." You must submit to me, and to my love for you ; you are to be saved through infinite

condescension ; and now, if you begin to resist my love and my condescension, when I come with this first affecting instance of it, you can not be saved ; “ If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” ’

It is interesting to read some of Peter’s words in his Epistles, when he had experienced the truth of the Saviour’s promise, “ What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” In his recovery from a grievous fall, in the kindness and love of Christ toward him after his resurrection, and on the sea shore “ when they had dined,” in the fulfillment of his Master’s assurance to him of eminent usefulness as a foundation stone of the Christian church, and in the wonderful gift to him of the Holy Ghost in the Saviour’s name, Peter had found that the washing of the disciples’ feet by their Lord and Master was no longer to be regarded with incredulous wonder, nor to be resisted as transcending their ideas of what was proper and right. Subdued by the gentleness and consideration in the Saviour’s treatment of him, discovering, in a very short space of time after the ascension, the great plan of forgiveness through a suffering Redeemer, and inspired to preach Jesus and the remission of sins, he saw that the Saviour kneeling and washing his sinful feet had been so far surpassed in his experience of the Saviour’s kindness to him, that the promise, “ What I do, thou shalt know hereafter,” was most abundantly fulfilled. So that in his Epistles

his soul glows like the sky into which the sun throws back all his radiance. "Whom, having not seen, ye love;" "the precious blood of Christ;" "a living stone;" "chosen of God;" "he is precious;" "bare our sins in his own body on the tree;" "Shepherd and Bishop of your souls;" "the just for the unjust;" "gone into heaven, angels, authorities, and powers being made subject unto him;" "to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

We are to spend eternity, if saved, under a dispensation of infinite love. The mind is lost in thinking what manifestations of kindness and love are to be made to us in heaven, judging from our experience as Christians in this world. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." This act of Christ — his washing the disciples' feet — seems to have been the opening scene in that mystery of love which was leading him to the cross. One object and one effect of it was, indeed, to give the disciples a lesson of brotherly love. This was a subordinate object. The narrative is introduced with these words: "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." We were made and redeemed to be loved, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." To be in heaven forever, — to be loved as the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost alone can

love, — to experience the full and yet growing tide of that which we have experienced in our awakening, our conversion, our progress in sanctification, in being kept from falling, and in communion with God here, will be an eternal weight of glory. Will the love of Christ end with our salvation from hell? ‘Having loved his own which were in the world, he will love them unto ——’ O, what shall we say? There will be no end. “O, give thanks unto the Lord of lords; for his mercy endureth forever;” “who remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth forever.” He who began his peculiar manifestations of love by washing his disciples’ feet, and finished by dying for us on the cross, will know you personally, speak to you, love you, admit you to greater intimacy with him than you enjoy here, and do things for you which will express a love and kindness equal to that which was expressed in washing the disciples’ feet. Well said the beloved John, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” As a man of immense wealth, about to be married, pours upon his bride a profusion of gifts, searches the treasures of France and Italy for something worthy of his love for her, spares no expense in fitting up his mansion and its environs to please her, so the Lamb’s wife will receive from her Lord expressions of affection, the sight of which, now, would make us feel like the Queen of Sheba, when, at the overpowering splendor

of Solomon, "there was no more spirit in her." You are going to be a king and priest unto God. All that Christ did for you by dying will be exceeded by what he will do for you by his life. Recall that four-fold use of the term, "much more," in the fifth of Romans, where Paul teaches us what the past history of redemption may lead us to expect. The love of Christ did not reach the last climax of its manifestation when he died; there is more to come, of which his death was only the beginning. We are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." These are the words of the man who once said to his Saviour, "Thou shalt never wash my feet."

The word of Christ is true concerning each of us: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." We must have feelings toward Christ responding to his feelings toward us, receive him as a Redeemer, being willing to confess our infinite need of him, and apply to him even for those feelings toward himself which we ought spontaneously to cherish, but which it is our deepest shame and the most affecting proof of our ruin that we do not possess. Pride alone will keep us from thus applying to him. But what a contrast have we here — a proud sinner, and a Saviour willing to wash his feet!

I have before me a message to one of you from a dying friend. It seems to me the most affecting message I ever heard from dying lips. I shall violate no secrecy if I deliver it in public, though I need not mention the name of the friend. The message is in these words: "Do this in remembrance of me."*

Is this all? I hear you say. Yes, it is all which will be of any lasting interest or importance. When you see that dying Friend upon the great white throne, and the earth and the heavens flee away, "Do this in remembrance of me" will involve all that will be of any consequence to you. And can you slight him? Shall he be born, live, die, rise again, for you, and must he plead with you, or need to ask you more than once, "Remember me"? You will hereafter and forever remember him. In heaven he will be to you "the light thereof;" in hell your sorest pain will be that you remember him. Consider what you have heard; accept him as he stoops to love and save you. Soon he will stoop thus no longer, but must lay aside those signs of condescension wherewith he has girded himself, and put on robes of judgment. Remember his word—"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

* Communion Sabbath, November 6, 1853.

XII.

PAUL.



WHO LOVED ME, AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME.

THE friendship of Christ would seem to have reached the highest possible summit in this world in the case of the Apostle Paul. This, however, was not owing to any difference in the natural endowments of the Apostle from those of other men. When natural gifts are joined with great moral qualities, and both are under the influence of religion, it is true there is, in one sense, more to love than in one of inferior capacity and acquirements. But sincere piety, in connection with humble talents and attainments, secures for its possessor the love of Christ in a proportion beyond the mere ratio of comparative greatness, as men would reckon it; for He who, looking at the heart, regards the intention, the motive, the desire, loves a humble woman casting all her living, in the form of a farthing, into his treasury, with an affection as strong of its kind as that excited by the love and service of the

angel. If any are disposed to question this, we may ask if they have ever loved a little child ; and if they have, whether that love was at all in proportion to intellect or attainments. It is an interesting and encouraging feature in the grace of God, that the degree of love which we excite in him is not dependent upon natural gifts, nor upon attainments differing with circumstances over which we have no control. So far as natural gifts and acquirements enable a man to love and serve God, so far, and no farther, do they make a difference in his love to us. Nothing is meritorious unless it be voluntary. The natural gifts which God bestows, and every thing which is merely the result of accidental advantages, confer no merit ; but the voluntary choice, the heartfelt consecration, the all-absorbing love excite a corresponding regard and love in him, to whom the difference in understanding or learning among men is of small importance, but who looks at the heart. It was because the Apostle had a heart which swayed his mighty intellect, and brought his great soul into full subjection to his God and Saviour, that he was a peculiar object of love with Christ. As a Friend, Christ appears in his preëminent excellence in connection with him whom we join with Peter and claim as “ our beloved brother Paul ; ” for if we but love and serve his Redeemer, there is no one of us whom this great servant of Christ would not be happy to own as a brother and friend, and without condescension ; for

these are the words of his adorable Master and ours :
“He that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

There are three things which set forth Christ as a Friend to the great Apostle to the Gentiles. One is, The forbearance and long suffering of Christ toward Paul previous to his conversion.

The Good Shepherd saw that wolf in his fold, with no earthly hinderance between him and the entire destruction of the flock. It was a little flock — a flock just gathered from a waste, howling wilderness ; and for their inexperience, well might we call them a flock of lambs. Every thing in their circumstances was suited to awaken the tender compassion of Christ, many of them having forsaken all things to follow him, in the face of contempt and persecution. Shall the church, purchased with his own blood, perish in its infancy ? “Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, and the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies toward her ? Are they restrained ?” It is not an injured emperor, his throne in peril, who seeks to suppress a powerful faction ; it is a private man, arming himself with the civil and spiritual authority which was indeed glad to find such an instrument ; and gratifying his vindictive rage, he went perhaps as far as any inquisitor even of the Romish church has ever been borne by his passion against heretics. “He made

havoc of the church ;” a doom was on every head, panic in every heart. “He entered into every house.” The sanctuary of home afforded no protection ; the family circle at morning and evening prayer was broken up by his ruthless presence ; the father was dragged from his knees, the mother from the side of the child kneeling with her, to prison. He “persecuted them even to strange cities ;” groups were seen consulting in haste, at the places where several roads met, which way to flee most surely from this besom of destruction. “He was exceedingly mad against them” — transported with rage, furious, heeding no prayer or tears, while he punished them in all the synagogues with all the variety of torture peculiar to every city ; and when they were put to death he “gave his voice against them ;” and more than this, — for it must have been their sorest affliction, — he “compelled them to blaspheme.” On the rack and in the flames, some of them abjured that sacred name wherewith they were called, their forced renunciation of their faith in many cases, no doubt, whetting his zeal and confirming his persuasion that he was doing God service. The witnesses who proceeded against Stephen, when they put aside their upper, loose garments to throw the stones, laid those garments for safe keeping at the feet of some responsible, prominent individual, who, in this case, was not a high priest, nor the ruler of a synagogue, but a young student of the law, whose

character and talents, and withal whose proficiency in the Jews' religion above those who were his equals, made him a centre of attraction and object of public confidence, so that in the whole excited city he was marked out as the chief accessory in that martyrdom, by the confidential act, on the part of the witnesses, of laying their raiment at his feet. Making good the promise of his early zeal, he was fast hastening to root out the religion of Christ from the earth; for with the disposition which he every where found to help him, and the unbounded terms of his commission from the high priest, and considering how he afterward labored in a good cause, there seems to have been nothing but the direct interposition of God to save the infant church from utter destruction. All this time He who loved the church, and gave himself for it, needed only to speak the word, and summon the blasphemer and persecutor to his bar, and give his people rest. However some may extenuate his guilt, he himself is the most credible witness as to its enormity.

He calls himself the "chief of sinners;" he ascribes his salvation to mere "mercy," and regards himself as "a pattern of all long suffering" on the part of Christ. Notwithstanding the history of his people abounded with instances of fearful judgments upon bold transgressors, and notwithstanding his sin was aimed directly at Christ, and he was doing "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,"

and while there never could have been a more pressing necessity for arresting the arm of a persecutor, and the faith and patience of the saints could never have been put to a greater trial, yet that injured Saviour, whose love for his friends is such that whoso shall give a cup of cold water only, even to the least of them, in his name, shall not lose his reward, spared this offender, interceded for him, and came to him at length over the mountains of his transgression, to make him his friend.

Nothing seems to have affected Paul more than the Saviour's long suffering toward him. He could not account for it when he thought merely of himself, and therefore he says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth a pattern of all long suffering to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." But if this relieves the difficulty in the mind of Paul, it only enlarges our view of the long suffering of God, seeing that his purpose in this instance was to teach men every where, and in all times, how he suffers long with great sinners, and is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Well may the prophet exclaim, "Who is a God like unto thee, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and passing by the offences of his heritage."

In Christ as a Friend to Paul, we notice further, The method by which he was arrested and brought to repentance.

There are three things in it, each of which is remarkable. In the first place, Christ arrested the attention of Paul by putting a question to him. This implies a treaty ; it says, "Come now and let us reason together;" it gives the offender liberty to answer in his own behalf; "declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." Was this done in the case of Belshazzar? The hand-writing on the wall contained no question, waited for no answer ; that was the language of doom ; it was the finger of despair. To endure the impious rage of this blasphemer so long in silence, and, when that silence was at last broken, to break it with a question addressed to him, is mercy which is above the heavens. But,

In the second place, the Saviour wrought a miracle for Paul's conviction. The light at midday, above the brightness of the sun, left no room for doubt or unbelief ; no long probation, no contest in his mind, ensued ; no parable was uttered, to be received or rejected ; no prophet met him with a threatening which he might believe or spurn ; a light above the brightness of the sun brought instant conviction to his mind. This was loving kindness and tender mercy. Yet both these manifestations of goodness in the Saviour's method of procedure with him were surpassed by this : —

Thirdly, Christ used the language of remonstrance with his persecutor. Remonstrance among men im-

plies power in the party addressed. We do not remonstrate with one whose will is in our control, one who is subject to our command. It also implies a sense of injury on our part, and a desire to be redressed; reason, instead of force, is employed to obtain it. The language that came from heaven to Paul on the way to Damascus would have come well from a victim in the flames to his tormentor; from an injured wife to a cruel husband; from a pious slave to a brutal master. David, fleeing from Saul, uses the same tone of address which the Son of David uses in speaking to this second Saul. "And David said to Saul, I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it." So spake the Lord of life and glory from his throne to his pursuer: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He pleads with him; he appeals to him; he leaves it with him, as it were, to say if this is right: Have I done you any injury? Will you continue to be my enemy? There is that in God which corresponds to humility in man. We fear to use that word to express it, yet there is no other. To read the prophets and hear God expostulating with wicked men, justifying himself, asking them to do him justice, is enough to break a heart of stone. No better illustration than this is to be found of that great truth which is the glory of the divine administration, the perfect free agency of intelligent beings. God does not govern us by force, as he governs the

seas and winds ; he treats us as intelligent and free, and therefore appeals to us, and seeks to influence us as upright men do their fellow-creatures. We have this principle of the divine government illustrated in its full power in the treatment of Saul of Tarsus. "Why persecutest thou me?"

In a single word of warning which Christ at last addressed to him, we see a spirit of forbearance and kindness mingling with the appeal to his reason. Jesus does not threaten him, but suggests trouble and failure as the result of his conduct, bringing to his thoughts that instrument used for fortification, the piece of timber traversed by sharp iron points, which stops a breach in the wall, the *cheval-de-frise*, and he lets Saul see himself as one who vents his rage with his foot against those spikes. Thus, to the end, mercy rejoices against judgment ; the sun makes the traveler to Damascus throw away the garments which the wind and storm would have made him keep.

It is a consideration of great importance that the first impressions of the Saviour on the mind of the great Apostle were those of kindness and love. If an enemy is to be subdued, and more especially if you expect to be on terms of great intimacy with him afterward, it is all-important that the way in which he is subdued should leave nothing to rankle in his memory. Paul, therefore, could not think of himself as frowned upon or spoken to with severity ; but his regenerated soul

waked into the light of life in some sense like Adam in Paradise, whose first moments of consciousness were associated always in his mind with nature bending around him with interest and love. There is infinite wisdom in this method of securing the future ardent love of this Apostle. Who, with a heart even of common mould, could have failed ever after to say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Once more : —

Christ appears a Friend to Paul, In making him pre-eminently useful.

He employed him as the first herald of salvation to the Gentile world. He counted him worthy to suffer for his sake ; and it is not every one who can be trusted to suffer. But Christ was such a Friend to Paul that in the very first lines of his commission we read, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my sake." The description of his sufferings several years afterward, including the number of times that he was beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, his life in peril by sea, and in fording streams, and from robbers, and in the wilderness, and in the city, and from false brethren, his weariness and painfulness, his

hunger and thirst, his watchings often, his cold and nakedness, enough to appall every heart where love to Christ, which is the strongest of all passions, does not reign, is followed by saying, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions and distresses, for Christ's sake ; for when I am weak, then am I strong." Eternal sources of joy in heaven are opened to him in his consciousness of supreme love to his Redeemer ; nor would he, for all the honors of earth, part with the recollection of one of his great sufferings in the missionary cause. He tells us of his crown. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." Paul's crown must be an object of great interest. Some of you have seen the crown of the British monarch with the royal jewels. How many of them would make one crown of equal value with his ? How many British realms, how many worlds, would buy that crown ? Yet see the beautiful humility of this man. He seems unwilling to think of himself as a crowned head, and deprecating that distinction, he says, "And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." There is truth as well as humility in this ; for the crowns of all who love and serve Christ in such a way that they "love his appearing," will leave their possessors nothing to desire except that they had begun earlier in life to love and serve Christ, and with more faith

and zeal had been able more constantly to say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

We have entered upon a theme to which there seems to be no end—the friendship of Christ for his servant Paul. He appeared to him so many times that the Apostle speaks of the abundance of the revelations, standing by him and bidding him, "Be of good cheer ; I have much people in this city ;" relating to him his institution of the sacrament of the supper ; inspiring him with matchless power of reasoning and eloquence ; employing him to write a large portion of the Bible, containing the most important exposition of the doctrines of the gospel ; making him the founder of churches ; taking him up for a season into the third heavens, as though he could not wait for the time of his decease, but must show him beforehand his own glory and his servant's future joy ; and giving him in the Christian church, throughout all ages, the name most honored of all the followers of the Lamb. When Christ sets his love upon a man, what a Friend is he ! "His favor is life ; his loving kindness is better than life."

Now that we have considered the mighty tide of honor and joy which constitutes the history, past, present, and future, of Paul, let us for a moment stand together, or rather, like the men who discovered

the sources of the Missouri, let us kneel and worship at the simple headspring of all this greatness. What is it but this? "He loved me, and gave himself for me." It was this conviction, and this alone, "Christ died for us," which made his soul one whole burnt offering of love and service to his Redeemer.

Our talents, our situations, our opportunities differ; but in one thing we are all alike, and in this we differ nothing from Paul — that each of us can say of Christ, "He loved me, and gave himself for me;" nor was there any reason why Paul should love Christ as he did, nor any obligation that made it proper for him to be such a Christian, which does not apply to every one of us. No wonder that he felt, and spoke, and acted as he did. There is nothing strange, nothing preternatural, in the piety of Paul; for if we only believed in Christ as he did, — nay, if we only felt what we really believe concerning Christ, — we should all be such Christians as Paul. There have been, there are such Christians; it is a reflection on the grace of Christ to deny it; the martyrs loved him so; the Roman amphitheatre, the stake, the dens and caves of the earth have witnessed it; the history of foreign missions, the private experience of many and many a Christian, followed by the consecration of his whole being to Christ and his cause, have proved that there is in Christian hearts a love to Christ which is stronger than human love, and stronger than death — a love

which many waters can not quench, nor floods drown.

It is interesting for each of us to look at the manner in which the Saviour effected our conversion, and see it marked by precisely the same quality of mercy, the long forbearance, the suggestion of inquiring thoughts and relentings, the strong conviction of truth and duty, the appeal to our reasonable fears. Thus we, as well as Paul, were "apprehended of Christ Jesus." Would that this love of Christ constrained us more. We must not, we can not, wonder that Paul loved his Saviour as he did. We only wonder at ourselves, that toward this same Saviour, who has treated us with the same forbearance and kindness with which he treated Paul, and to whom we owe Paul's whole debt of gratitude and love, we should be so cold, and in our service so unprofitable.

Of those who have heard Christ preached so long as many have enjoyed that privilege, and seen his table spread, witnessed conversions, and known the whole accumulated evidence for the truth of the gospel, there is no one who is not at this moment a greater sinner than Saul of Tarsus when he was converted. "Ignorantly in unbelief," was the palliation of his sin; but who of us can plead ignorance in rejecting Christ? He verily thought that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Naza

reth." Do you consider this your duty? He truly believed Christ to be an impostor. Do you? Light from heaven above the brightness of the sun has shone around you; a voice of expostulation has often stopped you on your suicidal way; but offers and promises of usefulness on earth, of having Christ for your Friend here and in glory everlasting, have never forced from you that submissive, self-consecrating word, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Paul has joined with his Saviour to make you a Christian; there are in your possession fourteen Epistles from him, and the substance of them is this: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." There are few things in this world to awaken astonishment compared with this, that any can hear their Saviour preached, and not have such feelings toward him as will bring them to his table, and send them from it to live only for Christ. But instead of this, some say, 'When members of the church are such as they should be, I will be a Christian;' or, 'I shall fare as well as many who profess to be better;' or, 'I never like to speak of my feelings;' or, 'Would you have me profess that which I do not feel?' or, 'I dislike excitement;' or, 'Go thy way for this time.' How much like Paul is all this! So long as we feel thus, his heaven and ours can not be the same.

Nothing but the power which conquered Saul can

save the unconverted of a Christian congregation. Guilt surpassing his, cries for vengeance against them ; but one word from an injured God and Saviour, and their trembling spirits will pass the gates of death. As Damascus, with its premeditated scenes of guilt, was before Saul, so guilt and ruin only are in the path of every one who goes on still in his trespasses, and deliberately puts off the claims of Christ. But he was ignorant ; and as you are not, this subtracts greatly from the probability of your being saved. There is but one solitary hope that some of you will be saved, and that is, the sovereign compassion of an injured Saviour. Left to yourself, you will never repent. He does not leave you to yourself ; for even now, perhaps, you are moved to think seriously of being a Christian. Is not Christ virtually speaking to you from heaven ? What a career of glory and honor, what a life, what an eternity yours may be if you become a Christian ! It was because Paul became a Christian that he can now say, "I am what I am." Had he not become a Christian, he would have failed to be the Apostle Paul ; he would still have been Saul of Tarsus. For eighteen hundred years he has had Christ for a Friend. Eighteen hundred years are before you ; will you have Christ for your Friend ? Eternity in heaven or hell awaits you ; will you make Christ your Friend ? Your final Judge, shall he be your Friend ? The Man of Calvary, the Saviour of the redeemed, shall he be your

Friend? Or will you be his enemy? as by his interpretation you are now, since “he that is not with me is against me”; or will you be his friend?

If you ask, ‘What must I do?’ say not, when you hear the answer, as Agrippa did when he heard the same words — say not, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Do you ask, ‘What must I do?’ Let me ask, ‘What did Paul do?’ Here is the reply: “Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

XIII.

STEPHEN.



LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT.

WHEN it was said, last Sabbath, that this series of discourses on Christ a Friend would be closed this morning by the contemplation of the dying Stephen, the text being then selected, and much of the sermon written, little did we think that the text and sermon would receive appropriateness and illustration from the death of my child. On each of the four Sabbaths preceding the last, two of these discourses had been preached; and, but for the accidental presence of a friend who preached for me, this discourse would have been delivered last Sabbath afternoon. Thus this sermon was reserved for to-day.* Were it not for the effect upon me of this undesigned coincidence, I should have kept silence this morning; but the Saviour and Friend of my little child, perhaps, has so ordered, that these efforts to honor him and commend

* November 26, 1853.

him to your love should have a seal of his approbation in this providential conjuncture of circumstances, which enables me, — alas ! at what bitter cost, — from an experience which they only know who have felt it, more effectually to prevail on you to make him your Friend ; and thus that sweet prophecy and promise respecting the times of Christ may be fulfilled in you — “ And a little child shall lead them.” May we but persuade you to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus may we save the souls of our people, let us suffer in any way which a merciful God may choose. It is a trial to speak in public with excruciated feelings of that which has made us suffer. “ Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged, and though I forbear, yet what am I eased ? ” The appropriateness of the text to these circumstances constrains me to make this sermon, which was mostly prepared a week ago, enforce its doctrine by preaching it to-day.

Now that I have brought myself to speak of this affliction, hear me a moment with regard to things suggested by it. That family burying-place now contains an infant's grave, by the side of another grave where the mother of seven of my children sleeps. That burying-place, with its one mound, has been a solitary spot till now ; but now, “ two or three are gathered together ” there in Christ's name ; for a little child seems to count for more than one in the family and in the grave. Solitary as the place has been, who

of you that has such a spot has not found it a place for prayer? By that lone grave, what may you suppose has been the burden of my soul? If I meet certain members of this congregation in heaven, I will tell them for whom I specially prayed; but let me say that, kneeling on that spot where I expect to be buried, I have found my thoughts powerfully drawn from every thing else to this, — I have found myself praying for nothing so earnestly as for this, — that all this flock, calling some of them by name, might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. If our afflictions do not make us selfish and contracted, they greatly enlarge our affections; we love those who have suffered or are liable to suffer; and if God has sustained us, we wish “to comfort others with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

Mental sufferings, moreover, have given me new impressions of the holiness of God; his power to inflict pain; his ability to look on and see us suffer, to accomplish his purpose of mercy or judgment; the infinite blessedness of a state of reconciliation and love between him and us through his dear Son; the anguish which there must be in sufferings which are punishment, and not discipline; eternal bereavements of kindred, especially of parents and children; the happiness of that state where all the joys of which our hearts are capable here, meet, to be purified and to be increased; and the terrible meaning of those

words of Christ, "lose himself or be cast away." If in yonder burial-place your pastor witnesses the scenes of that day,—

"When, at the world's last session,

The dreadful Judge in middle air shall spread his throne" —

he will remember how he prayed for you there, and preached to you here; how, at a place which he would have supposed should have absorbed all his thoughts, he strangely forgot his grief, and besought the Lord that he would give each of you repentance for your sins against God, and faith in the Redeemer. Those prayers are not fully answered; and now he comes from that spot, where he has so unexpectedly stood this week with his household, and laid the youngest of that flock to rest; and while every private feeling would constrain him to spend this day in silence, he feels impelled to speak, by the hope that the providence and grace of God may have designed this closing sermon on Christ a Friend for some good to your souls. The pastor who officiated at the funeral, in praying for my people, was pleased to speak of me as your "best earthly friend." I never felt at liberty to say so much of myself; but my heart responded to this appellation. What is there in the religion of any pagan nation, or in the Old Testament, like the relation between a Christian church and pastor? For twenty years this relation has subsisted between us, and on my part

nothing is left to desire but that each of you may have “Christ in you the hope of glory,” and prove it by holy living and good works. Our relation must come to an end; but these Discourses are a testimony that the best service which I have thought it possible to render you is, to promote a friendship between you and the Lord Jesus.

By various methods of illustration the Saviour has appeared before you in these Discourses as a Friend. We saw him at first in a group of mourners at a grave, and so afflicted with grief that the spectators said of him concerning the departed friend, “Behold how he loved him.” A man of business was sitting at his accustomed place. Jesus entered, — strange, too strange a visitor at a place of business, but the most profitable of all whose feet ever trod the worn floors of such places, — and made Matthew, as he has made some of you, and seeks to make all, follow him. The young men of the congregation have beheld him stopping a funeral train to raise a young man to life; and the widow has seen, in his pity for a widowed mother, a sign and pledge of his love for her and for her impenitent child. We have seen him treating a notorious publican and sinner with such skillful love that, though one of whom it is said, “How hardly shall

they enter into the kingdom of God," yet when Christ had taken possession of his heart and his house by his love, he stood and said, 'Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and for every act of injustice fourfold.' A weak, helpless woman, in the greatness of her faith, obtained a miraculous cure and a place in the sacred Scriptures, with a testimony of her Saviour's commendation and love, by privately touching the hem of his garment, and putting to shame those of us who have never believed. They of little faith have looked on as by wise indulgence the Saviour persuaded and saved Thomas, and then pronounced a blessing, not on him, but on those who believe before they have seen. The afternoon of a November Sabbath was seldom more dark than that in which a goodly number of you who were able to face the storm saw a vessel in the fourth watch of a tempestuous night, and Jesus coming to it walking on the sea, while Peter, impelled by love to go to his Saviour amid the billows, taught us, in the failure of his faith, that darkness and the floods of great waters afford the best of all opportunities for the triumph of faith. Not as a mere philanthropist, who could appreciate nothing but suffering, but as a lover of truth and good men, we have heard him say, at the approach of Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Choosing one third of his first Apostles from the sea, we have ventured to speak of him, we

trust without presumption, as the Friend of that most interesting class of men who for their capabilities of usefulness, we believe, were included by the prophet in "the abundance of the sea." His disposition inclining him to special friendship we have seen illustrated in the beloved disciple, from whose character we have learned what are the conditions and what the influence of the Saviour's peculiar love. As the sacramental table was spread before us, we saw the Redeemer washing the disciples' feet, and heard him say to our poor, sinful, proud hearts, which are naturally offended at his condescension, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." The great Apostle to the Gentiles has appealed to us for his Saviour as his Friend, in his long suffering, his kindness in the manner of his conversion, in making him useful, and thus preparing for him a crown which will never fade. In all our possible need thus far we have seen what a Friend Christ is; and yet it may be that to many, very many, it has appeared that nothing has been said coinciding with their conscious experience or wants. This discourse will supply the deficiency. We are to contemplate Christ as the Friend of the dying. I say, supply the deficiency; for whatever else we may not be, we shall each of us one day be a passing spirit; "for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." These will prob

ably be among the last words of many, if not of all, in this assembly. They have been the last words of a vast number since the death of that Christian martyr by whom they were originally uttered, and we have all either heard them from the lips of the dying or have read them among the last utterances of many whose death-bed experiences have been recorded. Whether these words will be our very last words or not, one thing is certain. Every one of us will now confess that when he comes to die, his desire is, that the Lord Jesus will receive his spirit. Is there one of us who dissents from this? Is there one that is indifferent to it? Is there one who says, 'I will never think of dying; let it come suddenly; let me not know when it is coming'? Were there no hereafter, we might thus die like the hunted ostrich, with its head alone concealed. But let it not be true of any of us that "there are no bands in their death."

In seeking to illustrate the character and offices of the Saviour as a Friend to the dying, several things deserve to be stated with special distinctness.

I. It is common for people in danger and in death to call upon Christ.

While it is true that if Christ be a Friend to the living in every possible variety of joy and sorrow, in all the peculiarities of their character and conditions, he is, he must be, the Friend of the dying, there is

this difference in a vast proportion of cases — and O, what a difference! how the scene changes, how the precedence in the relation is altered, in this respect, — that, whereas all our life long Christ called, it may be said of multitudes, when they come to die, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.”

An intelligent sea captain, when the subject of religion had been mentioned in his hearing, asked a friend if he had noticed that men in danger of their lives frequently call on Christ. The friend replied that, except in the case of dying Christians, he had not been aware that this was so; but the captain, who did not profess to be a Christian, replied that he had often noticed that sailors in their extremity, and when prayer was forced from them, used the name of Christ, calling upon him for mercy and help.

A man of great wealth, who was far from being of a religious disposition, brought up under influences which led him to think but little of Christ, was drawing nigh to death. He requested his attendant to leave him alone for a little while. She left the room, but stood near and within hearing, afraid to leave him for many moments, and as she waited, with the door partly open, she heard the sick man break forth in a most affecting prayer, addressed wholly to Christ, calling himself a poor, dying sinner, and imploring mercy and help from the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of sinners.

It is well authenticated that the infidel Voltaire in his death struggle called on the name of Christ. David Hume played cards a very short time before he died, being raised at his request from his sick bed for the purpose, as he said, of cheering his spirits with that amusement. But shortly after, the cold damps of death came upon him; and as the shadows of departing life were gathering over him, and he drew near to the invisible world, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, help me; Jesus Christ, save me." We are all, perhaps, familiar with the narrative, so well confirmed, respecting Thomas Paine, who addressed his last prayer to the Saviour of men, crying out, "God, have mercy upon me;" "Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me."

As we read the memoirs of Christians, we find that the words of the Christian martyr in the text have been, to say the least, as frequently as any other words, the last prayer of their departing spirits. The declaration is well established, that men in danger and in their last hours very frequently commend themselves to Christ, and appeal to him for help. It is not universally so; we make no unlimited statement; but it is a common thing for men in need of almighty aid to call upon the name of Christ, and upon him alone.

II. *The twofold nature of the Saviour, as God and man, was designed and is suited to encourage our resort to him in trouble.*

This seems to furnish the explanation of what has now been said, that men so frequently call on Christ when they need almighty help. We see in Christ, as it were, an almighty human being. In order to be so, he must have two natures; for a mere creature can not be endued with almighty power; a mere human person can not be in all places at one and the same time. The prominent impression which Christ makes upon us is that of a man; his human nature strikes us at first rather than his deity. This is purposely so; this is the object in the incarnation. If it were otherwise, the incarnation would lose its effect. Suppose that the deity were visibly manifested to us by an effulgent light, and beyond it, far in the distance, the eye could just discern the person of the man Christ Jesus connected with this effulgence. Such an arrangement would not be suited to our minds; we need that something comprehensible should make the prominent impression upon us, sustained, however, by apparent, obvious proofs of deity.

God gave the church in the wilderness a visible sign of his presence; it was a sign which they could bear to look upon, and at the same time one in which they knew that deity was enshrined. It was a cloud by day, which turned into a pillar of fire by night, the inherent brightness in it being eclipsed by the sun, and becoming in the daytime a beautiful cloud, but giving out its light as darkness drew on. This

was the visible place of Jehovah's presence, the place of that Angel of the Lord who is called by Malachi "the messenger of the covenant," "the Lord whom ye seek," or the Messiah. Now, this cloud was, in some sense, in those days, to the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God — this cloud was to Jesus Christ in that age what the human body was to him in a subsequent age; the cloud was one of the embodyings of Christ; (He was "that rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ;") and thus the divine presence was adapted to the senses and comprehension, and to the feelings, of men. It afforded every pious mind aid in prayer. As the worshipper stood at his tent door, and saw the cloud lying along the sky over the encampment, or when, in the march through the desert, it sailed along before the host, turning hither and thither to mark the path, and as the sun went down, this beautiful object, with its columnar shape to distinguish it all day long from the clouds, changed into a pillar of fire, shedding light on the tents, or, if necessary, lightening the way through the darkness of the night, every one can see that prayer and praise were made easier; that however much of filial confidence and love a good man may have felt toward his heavenly Father, this sign of his presence increased it, and his appropriate feelings toward that dread Being, who, while he is a parent, is a jealous God, and terrible in his doings toward

the children of men, were soothed by it, and that in trouble men were more ready to call on their ever-present God; in moments of fear and trembling on account of sin, they were reassured by it of his condescending love; and when they prayed, they must naturally have looked up at the cloud, instead of attempting to conceive of an infinite Spirit. This visible sign of God's presence was, no doubt, intended in part as a defence against idolatrous worship. Men have always been prone, since the fall, to make objects of religious worship. This shows that the human mind craves some embodying of the Deity; the comprehension of infinitude is impossible, all attempts at it are painful, and therefore men resort to graven or molten images which they fancy to be inhabited by deities, or else they worship the orbs of heaven. But the constant presence of that cloud by day and pillar of fire by night was intended to meet that feeling in the human mind; and it certainly took away all excuse for idolatry on the part of those who knew that God dwelt in that cloud. There was no shape in it to give them an idea of God; they "saw no similitude," but still they knew that he was there.

In the fullness of time, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Now, for what purpose was the Word made flesh?

The great object of the incarnation was the suffering of death. The Bible asserts this in express terms. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." The expression, "a little lower than the angels," is a scriptural term for human nature. Why was Christ made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death? The answer is, "that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, — that, through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, even the devil." We hear the pre-existent Word say, in communion with the Godhead, "Sacrifices, and offerings, and burnt offerings for sin thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." "By the which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The body of Christ, then, was for a sin offering. He was made flesh in order that he might die for sinners. This is the plain instruction of the word of God on this subject, and he who denies it, or breaks the force of it, takes away the hope of the world; there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.

But while the object of Christ's incarnation was the "suffering of death," there was a parallel, an auxiliary purpose in the incarnation; and that purpose is expressed, not to multiply quotations, in these passages of Scripture: "Forasmuch, then, as the children are

partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same ; ” “ It behoved him to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.”

Here we see brought to view the adaptedness of Christ's human nature to the necessities of men. The cloud and pillar of fire, the “glory of the Lord,” as the symbol of God's presence with the prophets and in the temple was called, no longer conceal the Deity ; but Deity descends in the person of the man Christ Jesus ; “ The Word is made flesh, and dwells among us.”

When a running vine appears above the ground, the watchful hand of its owner supplies it with a small trellis, a lower rail, to aid its infantile efforts in ascending. However vigorous that vine may afterwards become, it can not stand alone ; it needs, and always will need, something on which to cling, and as it shoots forth you must supply it with helps accommodated to its wants.

The human nature of Christ is like the support and helper of the feeble vine. We are naturally troubled at the thought of an infinite God, unless we have blotted out from his character every thing but fondness and made him nothing but a doting father, who must by all means clear the guilty. Especially when we are sick, and are drawing near to the presence of Him whom no man can see and live, if we feel any

thing, we feel our need of some special assurance from God, some encouragement to faith. Then we seem to hear Christ speaking to us: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me." He does not place God at a distance from us, nor come between us and him, as a defence against him: on the contrary, he enables us to think of God and of himself identically, fulfilling his words to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is in the face of Jesus Christ." Here we have the idea of a disk, which, while it is small, and the incomprehensible orb is hid behind it, yet is the only means by which that orb can be usefully seen by us. Such is "the face of Jesus Christ." Does he come between us and God so as to interfere with your relation and feelings to your heavenly Father? No; God by him 'shines into our hearts.' Christ is one whom we can understand, and who, we feel, can understand us. Besides, we remember that he has given us the highest proofs of love, because he has died for us; and he is represented every where in the Bible as a condescending, compassionate Friend. He makes the prevailing impression on our mind, notwithstanding his almighty nature, that he is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. There is nothing of state, or pomp, or wealth,

or learning about him, to make us feel our inferiority ; he makes himself appear superior to us only in his goodness and in his power and willingness to help and save us. Could we, could the wisdom of angels, be employed to devise some expedient by which poor human nature, conscious of guilt and weakness, should be helped to conceive of God, and to obtain confidence in his feelings toward us, we could not have devised such a plan as that the Word should be made flesh and dwell among us, that he should be born, suffer, weep, die, and then, ascending to heaven, say, " And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

III. *The appeal which men make to Christ, when they are in need of almighty help, is a proof of his supreme deity.*

No one will pretend that appeals to the Virgin Mary by the superstitious are parallel to the prayer of the dying Stephen ; for if we insist that they are alike, we make Stephen an idolater, or else we must deny that the worship of the Virgin is idolatry. Dying men, moreover, pray to Christ, not to enlist his influence with God, but as the source of supreme power. This is one of those indirect, yet conclusive proofs respecting the character of Christ which secretly confirm the minds of men in their investigations. How do men feel toward Christ when there is no previous bias of the mind in favor of any par-

ticular religious opinions, or when that hour draws nigh, that honest hour, when the soul is approaching into the presence of its Maker? Do men ever appeal to Christ at such a time? Yes. Do they pray to him as a mere teacher and example? No. How do they speak to him? They pray to him as they pray to God. There is no act of a human being so solemn and important to him as the act of commending his soul to an unseen hand. But a most frequent expression of dying Christians is, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The same prayer which the man Christ Jesus uttered on the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," is used substantially by dying saints — "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

You can not account for this on any other supposition than that there is something in Christ which warrants and encourages the confidence of men in such an hour, an hour when all which is precious to them is at stake, and when, if ever, the God who made them is needed to save them. We should suppose beforehand, in view of the plain representations of the Bible respecting Christ, that it would be so. But the supposition is confirmed by actual events. This shows that men who do this secretly feel that Christ is almighty. Some of them have no theory on the subject, no religious notions to support by doing so; they may even theoretically deny that which their hearts profess; for spontaneously, when flesh and heart are

failing, instead of calling upon the Deity, upon God as such, the language of thousands and thousands has been and will be, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." I am willing to build my hope on one who has the testimony of dying men to his almighty power; not scholars, nor wise men, nor mighty men, but dying men. These worship Christ. These commend their spirits to him. Christ is God to me. "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

This is not speculation. It is something in which we are more deeply interested than in any thing else. Your dying moment — what importance and interest gather about it. That moment is on the wing. Your spirit must ascend to God who gave it. Thousands and tens of thousands, without previous concert, but as the spontaneous expression of their feelings in that honest hour, have used this as their last prayer, as the world receded and eternity broke in upon them: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Into whose hands should we commend our souls, but those which were nailed to the bitter tree for our advantage? In whom are we warranted to confide, but in him who, because we are flesh and blood, "himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death — that is, the devil"? This is no disparagement to the Father; the Father, Son, and

Holy Ghost have so arranged the system of redemption that Christ is the way of access to God. This is the object of the incarnation. So he stands and receives the departing spirits of all believers. Christ says, "I am the door of the sheep." He was the door to Stephen into heaven. He has been the door of heaven to tens of thousands since his day; and when you seek admission there, among your last words, if it be not the very last, will be this prayer: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

We speak to the believer, and not as arguing with an unbeliever. We speak to all "who have obtained like precious faith with us," and with them we see, in a passage of Stephen's dying scene, one of the incidental, and therefore deeply impressive presentations of the Sacred Three in the Godhead. "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whom we believe, were here concerned in an act of condescending love to a faithful servant and dear child. The history of redemption in the apostolic times more fully revealed them, and their names more frequently and more familiarly occur together. Instances come to mind within our Christian circles in which the deeply afflicted and the dying have had intelligent impressions of communion and fellowship with the Three together, in whose name they were

baptized, in whose name, at the close of Sabbath worship, they are blessed. Deem it no impossible act of condescension. The manger, the cross, the tomb show that nothing is impossible in the way of condescension on the part of God to one whom he loves. Christ says, "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him ; " and if with this we believe in the personality of the Holy Ghost, we can not doubt that, as those three mysterious men came to Abraham's tent, so, in some special seasons of his Christian life, one who is in extremity, or deeply humbled, and full of faith and love, or near to heaven, may have thoughts and feelings, with regard to the Sacred Three together, which will surprise and delight his soul. We should more commonly seek to think of them, and pray to them, unitedly ; it strengthens our faith and love toward them ; we worship them connectedly ; we do this in words, in our doxologies, baptisms, and benedictions ; we should oftener reduce these to practical experience.

The imputation of worshiping three Gods we can not answer to the full satisfaction of an objector, as many know who once were objectors, and to whom flesh and blood did not reveal the peace of mind which they now have in connection with their belief in this truth. We respect, we love many who remonstrate with us against tritheism, as they view it ; but we can not take their want of experience as the meas-

ure or guide of our Christian knowledge. Evangelical believers, of all sects, fellow worshipers of the Sacred Three in One, can not explain this mystery; they once may have rejected it; but having first, as sinners, "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them," they have come to receive the Three in One as they present themselves in the Bible, and to our Christian experience, with their divine names, offices, attributes, worship, and works; and they leave it to be explained, or not, in heaven, how God is One and Three. If there has been a time in their experience when they have had peculiar nearness to God, some of them will say, perhaps, that it was in the consciousness that the Father, Son, and Spirit were making impressions upon them of their presence. The work of redemption alone has brought to view the mystery of the divine nature, so that nothing is more identified with our spiritual interests, and therefore with our private experience as Christians, than the existence and agency of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

But it was Jesus, "God manifest in the flesh," who caught the eye of the dying saint; and therein Christ fulfilled one great purpose of his coming, which was, as we have seen, to give to the eye of our faith and the hand of our hope something objective, comprehensible, in connection with Deity. This teaches us that to simplify our views of God, to make them

more and more human, to conceive of him more as we do of a great and good man, is most in accordance with the way in which, by his own phraseology in the Bible, and by being manifest in the flesh, God teaches us to conceive of him.

If every thing else becomes simple the more we know it, and that, too, notwithstanding it expands and grows more wonderful the longer we study it, strange indeed would it be if the greatest and best thing, and that which it is "life eternal to know," should overwhelm and confuse us. To prevent this effect, which the knowledge of God might have upon our perverted minds, God was manifest in the flesh. Philip expressed our natural feelings when he said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." That seemed to be the summit of religious attainment, to have a definite comprehension of God. Christ said that to see him was to see God — that all in God which our limited faculties could comprehend, or our hearts feel, we have in him. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?" What trifling, this, with a disciple and inquirer, if he who said it were not qualified by identity of nature to be a substitute in the mind of the disciple for that idea of God which his soul was feeling after. We can not imagine a creature, however exalted, venturing to use such words. It is safe, therefore, to bestow on Christ all the feelings which the

soul ever has toward its God. It is God who weeps, and pities, and makes propitiation. It is the same as though the Father were in human flesh. Let him become flesh, he would feel and speak, he would act, as Christ did. The Father does not stand aloof for Christ to persuade him. On the contrary, Christ says, "The Son can do nothing of himself," nothing alone; "the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works;" so that all those works of compassion and love which we have been considering in these Discourses are the works of the Father.

But flesh and blood, clothing the divine nature, encourages our approach, helps our faith. It was the sudden presentation to Stephen of the human form of Christ amidst the radiance of heavenly glory which filled him with such sudden rapture that he forgot the presence of the council, and cried out, "Behold, I see heaven opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Great faith angers wicked men. "They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him." And while the stones were felling him to the earth, he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He thought aloud. A man dying by stoning would hardly have said any thing by way of argument, or merely for impression upon others. It was worship. No private place of prayer ever witnessed, nor did the be-

loved disciple leaning on Jesus' bosom ever experience, greater fellowship and communion with Christ than Stephen may have had under that shower of stones. But what is it which constrains or permits a soul passing into the presence of its God thus to address its prayer to Christ? Is it wrong? If he be not divine, it is wrong, and then these dying Christians are idolaters; or if the worship paid to one creature at such a time be right, how can we object to the idolatries of the Romish church? If we may worship a mere human son, there may be reason in appealing to his mother to intercede with him.

No interpretation of Scripture respecting Christ explains this spontaneous enthronement and worship of him by human hearts in the hour of death but that which gives a literal meaning to such words as these: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh."

Though we claim that reason can find no valid objection against this essential truth, and though reason must judge of the evidence which sustains it, still a higher power than reason is necessary to make it congenial to the heart. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven." Far be it from us, in saying this, to represent this knowledge

as unattainable except by members of certain sects or the defenders of a creed. It is the free gift of God to every one who feels his need of other righteousness than his own, and submits to the righteousness of God.

We are each drawing toward the solemn hour when the test of our faith and confidence in Christ will be applied, and we shall see, and others will see, with what feelings we habitually regard him, and what our relations to him have been. The very last words of Stephen were not words of rapture nor of triumph. This is encouraging. No difficult attainment is held forth, no mysterious experience. Stephen's dying act was a prayer — a prayer to Christ. It was indeed a prayer of faith, of confidence, yet still a prayer; but to offer such a prayer, at such a time, implied a committal of the soul to him with all its interests, which Stephen must have learned to make before.

When dear friends, when children, are dying, the everlasting arms are under us if we have faith to think of the Saviour of the world as receiving the departing spirit. At such a moment we feel a strange disconnection between a child, for example, and ourselves, as though some one had come in and supplanted us. It makes us feel weak, helpless, sinful; impresses

us with the individual accountability of souls ; shows us that parent, and child, and friends can not save each the other ; and then the thought of One who is able to receive each redeemed soul with a personal love and care, and is therefore every where present, gives us adoring thoughts of our Immanuel, God with us. Shall we fail to love and serve Him who saves our children, our dying friends ?

There are other separations awaiting many, far more intensely painful than at the dying bed. When they see a child, a companion, with Christ, but must themselves go away from Christ, how will they bear to think that many, very many, exhortations were addressed to them for the express purpose to make them receive Christ as a Friend ?

There is an hour which is more important even than that hour. That hour is *now*. In the hour of judgment, every thing will have been fixed ; all which we can do for the soul will have been done or left undone forever. The present hour, therefore, is the most important.

You may have occasion for Stephen's prayer too soon to admit of any delay in coming to Christ. How long would you be willing that Christ should postpone an answer to your prayer when dying ? Let that be the measure of your delay in doing your duty. Receive and obey the call of Christ with the readiness

and earnestness with which you would have him answer when you cry, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Let us, then, in conclusion, "confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus," and say, "WORTHY IS THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN TO RECEIVE POWER, AND RICHES, AND WISDOM, AND STRENGTH, AND HONOR, AND GLORY, AND BLESSING." "YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME." "UNTO HIM THAT LOVED US, AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD, AND HATH MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD AND HIS FATHER, TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN."

"Head of the church triumphant,
We cheerfully adore thee;
Till thou appear, thy members here
Will sing like those in glory.
We lift our hearts and voices
In blest anticipation,
And cry aloud, and give to God
The praise of our salvation.

While in affliction's furnace,
And passing through the fire,
Thy love we'll praise, that knows our days,
And ever brings us nigher;

We lift our hands, exulting
In thine almighty favor;
The love divine that made us thine
Shall keep us thine forever.

Faith now beholds the glory
To which thou wilt restore us,
And earth despise for that high prize
Which thou hast set before us;
And if thou count us worthy,
We each, as dying Stephen,
Shall see thee stand at God's right hand,
To take us up to heaven."

THE END.



